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Lightning Lew, the King of the Secret Service

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BY EDWARD GAINES BURNES.



IRON-NERVED AS HE WAS, THE OLD DETECTIVE SHUDDERED. WAS IT THE WANTED CASHIER OR HIS APPARITION?

Lightning Lew,

The King of the Secret Service;

OR,

Sam Sharp's Big Score.

The Romance of A Double Life.

BY EDWARD GAINES BURNES,
"Brown Ned," of the Secret Service Corps,
 AUTHOR OF "THE LEAGUE OF SEVEN," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEFAULTING CASHIER.

WHEN the New York papers announced that Edmond Abbot was a defaulter—a forger—astonishment, as well as consternation, was both genuine and general.

"If a man like Abbot—the cashier of a big company—gives way to temptation, what are we to expect from our clerks?" business men asked each other.

Three days before the crash came, the directors of the company of which Mr. Abbot was cashier, met to consider the making of a big loan, and, at the same time, ascertain, exactly, the financial condition of their concern.

When the Board Room clock struck ten everybody was surprised, and many felt a trifle triumphant, to find that that personification of punctuality—the cashier—*could be* behind time.

When the clock struck eleven, some little alarm began to be manifested, and much relief was expressed, when a message was received from Mrs. Abbot, saying her husband had been summoned to the bedside of his dying father.

"A great relief, gentlemen, I must confess," remarked the president, as he returned Mrs. Abbot's letter to the envelope, after reading it.

"I feared," he continued, "that some accident had happened to delay our worthy cashier—a man who, for years, has not been a day absent or a minute late."

The listeners smiled approvingly—as much at the speaker, as the speech.

The cashier was as notoriously penurious and exacting, as he was famous for his punctuality, and correct habits, and words of praise from him to a subordinate, were never uttered—or expected.

Mr. Wright, the president, on the other hand, was generous with kind words, and cash. Every charitable organization in the city knew him, and where he kept his bank account.

To those present in the Board Room, it seemed almost amusingly generous, to hear liberal Mr. Wright praise close-fisted, cranky Mr. Abbot.

Three days afterward, the president's words of praise were remembered—and by no means approvingly, because an examination of the books had revealed a series of false entries, and forged securities, to support them.

Inquiry at the cashier's residence, disclosed the fact, that the letter explaining that Mr. Abbot had been sent for by his dying father, was *not* written, (as it purported to be,) by Mrs. Abbot. She knew nothing of it, nor of her husband's whereabouts.

"I have not seen him since Sunday," she explained to the detective, who was searching for the cashier.

"Nor heard from him?" questioned the officer, looking rather skeptical.

"Oh, yes. I received a message Sunday night, saying my husband was called away by important business, and would not return for a week."

"It was business connected with the company, I understood," continued Mrs. Abbot beginning to look troubled. "Is it not so?"

"You read the papers, madame, I presume?" counter-questioned the officer, doubtfully.

Mrs. Abbot blushed painfully, and looked embarrassed, as she answered:

"My husband is a very careful, saving man. He brings home the only paper we read."

The detective stared in astonishment.

Could it be possible, that this robber of hundreds of thousands, carried his hypocritical penuriousness into his home?

"Then, madame, you are not aware that your husband is supposed to have run away—to, in fact, to have robbed the company and fled?"

Mrs. Abbot was a delicate, refined-looking woman of about forty, and the officer pitied her, when he saw the expression of agony called up by his blunt statement of the case.

"I believe she is entirely innocent of any knowledge of her husband's rascality," he reported to Mr. Wright. "She was fairly over-

whelmed, to learn that the man who made her account for every penny she received, was at the same time squandering thousands—could not believe it."

"Well, it's only too true, too true," remarked the president, sighing, and adding:

"Where can he have gone to?"

"That's a tough question to answer, Mr. Wright. Had he disappeared Saturday, I should have said to Europe, but he was here until long after all the steamers had sailed, so, his flight must have been confined to this country and the police of every city are on the lookout."

"Yes. Well, it's a very said affair, but we came off better than might have been expected. The total loss will not exceed a quarter of a million, and the misguided man could as well have stolen double, ay, quadruple that sum."

"Must have queer ways of doing business in this concern," thought the detective, and aloud: "I suppose you care more about the money than the man?"

"Why?" asked Mr. Wright, sharply.

"Oh, well, that is the way with most heavy losers. They nearly always compromise."

"We will not interfere with the course of justice, to regain what has been stolen," returned the president, in an unusually stern tone.

"That certainly does not sound like letting him down easy," commented the detective, as he passed out of the offices of the big banking and trading company.

Alone, Mr. Wright was pacing the floor of his private office, looking strangely agitated, and muttering:

"Strange, very strange! A week has elapsed, and yet he has not been found. Where is the body? Why has it not been discovered? Good heavens! If it should become mutilated, that would lead to an investigation and that would lead to—"

A tap on the office door interrupts Mr. Wright's agitated thoughts, and in an instant he recovers himself.

"Two ladies to see you, sir!" announces the clerk, who enters in response to the president's kindly spoken "Come in."

"It's some charity affair," adds the clerk.

"Don't detain them," returns the president.

CHAPTER II.

LIGHTNING LEW.

Two weeks have elapsed since the robbery, and flight of the cashier, of The Great American Banking and Trading Company, has been made public, but no trace of the missing man has been discovered.

Business is going on as usual at the company's offices, and the genial, big-hearted president appears to be about the only person retaining any interest in the defaulter.

Mr. Wright, in fact, looks more and more worried, as the days pass without any information being received of Mr. Abbot, and finally he calls on a famous man-hunter.

Lewis Pryce was a private detective, then, but only recently released from Government employment—after fifteen years' work, as the most trusted man in the Secret Service—a man famous for his skill and undaunted courage.

The night before Mr. Wright called on the detective, the latter received another visitor on the same errand: the daughter of the missing man, Lucy Abbot.

After announcing who she was, the visitor continued:

"I have called, Mr. Pryce, to deliver this letter, which appears to have escaped the notice of those who have been searching among my father's papers, through being pushed behind a drawer."

The detective took the proffered letter, which was unsealed, and read:

"Should I at any time, and under any circumstances, disappear, or be fatally injured, have a skillful detective make a thorough investigation of the matter—*regardless of appearances!* The amount inclosed, (\$500,) should be sufficient to have this done."

The letter, unsigned, was addressed simply: "To my family," and had the appearance of being written a long time but bore no date.

"Mr. Abbot evidently expected trouble," observed the detective, adding:

"Am I to understand that you wish me to undertake the work ordered done by this letter, and paid for by this money?"

Miss Abbot bowed assent, and Pryce continued:

"May I ask how you came to select me?"

"I asked a friend who would best answer the requirements of the letter—who was the most skillful detective he knew of, and being informed, came to you."

A slight blush accompanying the reply, caused Pryce to refrain, for the moment, from inquiring who "he" was, but as the young lady was about to depart, she forestalled the question, by saying:

"The gentleman who advised calling on you will call himself to-morrow. His name is Draper—William Draper."

"You mean the young millionaire, I presume?" said the detective, as calmly as if he had not with difficulty restrained a whistle, on hearing the name.

Miss Abbot smiled faintly, as she replied:

"No, I do not think Mr. Draper is a millionaire. He is a working man—a writer, or reporter, I understand."

"The very man; but, what the mischief is he up to, now?" muttered Pryce, when the door had closed on his visitor.

"Well, he sent me the case, at all events—and a deuce of a one it is! She can give me no hint; the father's papers are seized, or have been sifted of everything of value, and—well, I must lock through them to-morrow."

With the morrow, came Mr. Wright—just as the detective was about starting for the suburban residence of the Abbots.

"I have come with reference to the disappearance of Abbot—the defaulting cashier of the Great American Banking Company," explained Mr. Wright.

The police appear to be unable to find any trace of him, and I have decided to employ outside assistance—as representatives of the company of course."

"Of course," assented Pryce, "and you are—?"

He knew perfectly well, but, then, Mr. Wright had not informed him. Possibly, the latter thought the detective must know him. Still the question seemed to displease the banker, who replied, in a reproving way:

"You bear the reputation of being a very discreet man, Mr. Pryce, and I trust you will deserve it in this matter."

The detective bowed, and then watched, and listened, sharply, and carefully—much more so than he appeared to be doing.

"My interest in the affair is partly friendly," continued Mr. Wright, "and, for that reason, you need go no further than ascertaining what has become of the unfortunate man. I know him for many years, and would like, if possible, to know where he is, and what doing."

"When you have anything to communicate, address Mr. Smith, care of these lawyers."

The banker handed over the business card of a well-known law firm, as he spoke, adding:

"You will receive a check from that firm during the day. When more is needed, apply to them."

The last words were uttered, as the speaker picked up his hat, and, with a nod, left the office, before the detective could explain that he was already engaged in the Abbot matter.

"Well this is queer!" Price declared, as, refraining from running after his late visitor, he resumed his chair. "Is this concealment merely his modesty, or, is there something more than friendliness back of this anxiety to know the fate of the cashier?"

For a few minutes, the detective appeared to be buried in thought, the result of which can only be inferred from the words uttered, as he started, for the second time, to visit the Abbots:

"Yes, it is well I did not inform him."

Detective Pryce—or Lightning Lew as his comrades had dubbed him, because of his quickness, and boldness, in getting into, and through with, whatever he undertook—was not fated to get out of his office so easily that morning, for, on opening the door, he found himself facing a young man, evidently about entering, who saluted him with:

"Ah! Just in time to catch you, eh?"

"Just in time, Mr. Draper. Will you come in, or can we talk going along?"

"To where?"

"To call on Miss Abbot," replied the detective, glancing slyly at the young man.

"We'll talk here," decided Mr. Draper, adding: "And, remember, it's all confidential, and Miss Abbot is to know nothing more than that I called to urge you to use every effort to discover what has become of her father."

"There is, however, another matter I wish to speak of, and which I wish you to look into."

"On the day Abbot is supposed to have fled, I put into his hands a draft for \$100,000, for which I hold his *personal* receipt—and I am out just that amount!"

"How came you to accept his receipt, instead of the company's?"

Except for the frank, good-natured expression

of his countenance, William Draper, notwithstanding he was a millionaire, was a very ordinary-looking young man of twenty-five, or six, although accounted rather clever in many respects. Deception, apparently, was not one of his traits.

Coloring slightly, the young man explained. "A short time ago, I met Miss Abbot at an exhibition got up for the benefit of an artist. I wished to, but did not, receive an invitation to call on her, although we became pretty well acquainted, and taking the advice of a friend, I determined to call on business—on the father."

"My friend assured me that Abbot never mentioned anything but household expenses to his family, and making an excuse of this draft, (which I had filed over during the day,) I called at his house, told him I wished his company to invest it, and, on his refusing to accept it as cashier, took his personal receipt."

"Now, Pryce, if that man had any idea of running off, why did he refuse my sight draft—as cashier? And, even as it is, why has it not been presented—or cashed elsewhere?"

"Probably afraid it would furnish a clew to his whereabouts," thoughtfully replied Pryce.

"Nonsense! He had three days, in which it could be cashed without suspicion."

"You are well informed."

"No more than the newspaper accounts. But that has nothing to do with it. I want to be better informed—and you are the man to furnish the information, if any man can."

"You, of course, know I am already engaged?"

"I expected you would be; but, again, that has nothing to do with my part of it. What you do for me, must not be known—not at present, if ever."

Mr. Draper arose as he finished, and accompanied the detective to the street, where they parted.

"There is no modesty about my third engagement—it's a clear case of love," declared Lightning Lew as he started, for the third time, to call on the Abbots.

CHAPTER III.

A CLEW TO THE CASHIER.

BOTH the president and the cashier of the Great American Banking and Trading Company resided out of the city—the former during the summer only, and the latter continually.

Mr. Abbot's neat cottage was about a mile further away than Mr. Wright's magnificent residence, and this fact was brought to Pryce's knowledge by an article which he read while on the way.

The article was headed: "A Clew to Abbot," and went on to state that the hat and coat of the defaulter had been found in an out-house, near the river, on the grounds of Mr. Wright at Brookvale-on-the-Hudson.

Commenting on the affair, the paper suggested that the hat and coat were placed where found, to give the impression of suicide, though admitting the possibility of Abbot having, in a moment of desperation, plunged into the river.

A full rehearsal of the case followed, and the detective learned several interesting facts, which his clients had either concealed from him, or were not aware of.

First: Among Abbot's private papers were a number of receipts for expensive dresses, shawls, hats, jewelry, etc., of which Mrs. Abbot knew nothing. She and her daughter had made almost everything they wore.

Second: The officer who had found these mysterious receipts had been unable to trace the goods they called for, but the company had not pushed inquiry in that direction. The reporter, however, had, and found that, though delivered at various addresses, all went to a Mrs. Strange.

Third: Mrs. Strange was a near relative of Mr. Wright.

This last was given as a new discovery; it ended the article, and occupied but a couple of lines. It was a startler, however.

"By Jove! Wright's sister!" exclaimed the detective, and turning the paper to make sure of the name and date, continued:

"I'd give something to know the fellow who wrote that—and I'll bet he knows more."

"Brookvale!" announced the brakeman, interrupting Pryce's reflections, and then the train stopped.

"I'll walk the rest of the way, and have a look at that out-house," the detective suddenly decided, and as the train started he jumped off.

"Which way to Mr. Wright's?" he inquired of the ticket agent.

"Right along the river road. It's not over a

quarter mile, but you'd have had a free ride, if you'd got off quicker."

"How so?"

"Mr. Wright's just gone up in that carriage."

"Thank you," said Pryce, and then, the lightning brain seizing the possibilities of the case:

"Does Mr. Wright spend the winter season here?"

"No, no! Never comes here, except for a few days 'round Christmas. Must be 'something up' at the house."

"Didn't spend this Christmas here," continued the agent, answering the very question Pryce was burning to ask, "but he made up for it 'round New Years, and everybody got their presents when he came."

"That's about the time one of your citizens disappeared?" suggested Pryce, placing a cigar in the ticket window, and lighting another.

"Oh, you mean that Abbot. Yes, it was about that time—same day, I guess, but he ain't much loss t' anybody—'cept them he robbed."

"Well, I guess it's time to be moving," decided the detective, consulting his watch, and as he started:

"See you coming back, I hope. Just stopped to look at Mr. Wright's place."

"You'll find it worth while," commended the agent, adding:

"It's a fine place—like the gentleman that owns it."

"I'm not so dead sure of that, my friend," muttered Pryce, as he left the station.

It was only a quarter mile to the out-house, referred to in the newspaper article, but, before he had covered the distance, the detective had managed to ask himself a number of unsatisfactory questions regarding Mr. Wright.

"Lightning Lew!" he exclaimed in disgust. "There's as much lightning about me, as there is in the brains of a turtle—and turtles are not—"

"Eh? What does that mean?"

"That," which caused Pryce's sudden interruption of himself, was the sight of Mr. Wright coming out of the outhouse, and going toward the river.

The banker walked slowly, looking right and left, but always with his eyes bent on the ground.

"What the dickens is he looking for?" muttered the detective, and, after a moment's thought, walked quickly and quietly after the banker, until close to the latter, when he asked:

"Lost anything, sir?"

For a few moments Mr. Wright was unable to speak. At the sound of Pryce's deep voice, he uttered an inarticulate, terror-stricken cry, shrunk like one dreading a blow, and seemed about to fall.

"I hope you will forgive me—I fear I startled you," said the detective, catching his staggering client by the arm.

"You hope—you fear!" cried the banker, stammering with rage, and wrenching his arm free. "Confound you! What d'ye mean by stealing upon people in their own—"

Suddenly recognizing the object of his wrath, Mr. Wright stopped short, and then sharply demanded:

"Why are you here, sir?"

"On the way to call on the Abbots, I came this road, to get a look at the beautiful residence of Mr. Wright, and saw you apparently looking for something. Being on your service, I deemed it my duty to offer to assist."

The detective's calm, even explanation did not seem to please the banker—nor was it intended to. Pryce believed in nothing. He wanted to see more of the real nature of his employer.

"Have you learned—found anything?" asked the latter, abruptly.

"I have found nothing," quietly replied Pryce, "but, I have learned that Abbot's hat and coat were found here by a reporter."

"Oh, you heard of that, eh?" angrily retorted the banker. "Well, you find the body! That's more important than the clothes."

"Body?" repeated the detective.

"Well, the man, if you like that better."

Suddenly changing his tone, Mr. Wright continued:

"By the way, do you happen to know any one connected with that paper?"

"Oh, ho! Then you have read it!" thought Pryce, and aloud:

"I am not certain, but think I do."

"Very well; but, whether or not, you must ascertain for me who wrote that article. Do that immediately!"

The detective shook his head, and smiled.

"You could not have set me a harder, more impossible task," he declared.

"Bah! A boy, backed by money, could perform it; but I do not choose to employ boys, so you must do it."

"And, remember, money is unlimited! I must have that name, and at once!"

"Better go straight to the city," continued the banker in a calmer tone; "it will be useless to seek the Abbots for information in the other affair. They have none to give, or I have been grossly deceived."

"I have never yet been deceived," quietly observed Pryce.

"Well," testily, "you cannot see them here, anyhow. They have removed to the city, I suppose, but don't know. At all events, acting for the company, I loaned—gave them money to clear out."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRESIDENT'S FRIGHT.

MR. WRIGHT'S announcement staggered the detective, and, before he recovered from his surprise, the former continued:

"There will be a train down in a few minutes, so you had better start."

This was an order, and Pryce obeyed, saying:

"I will try, but warn you, it will be wonderful if I am successful."

"And, even if I am," he continued to himself, as he hastened toward the station, "it's not at all certain that you will know it."

At the station the detective found the agent quite as communicative as before, but busier, and, in response to a remark regarding the likelihood of the Abbots being ashamed to remain in Brookvale, he only said:

"Oh, they're off, already. Went to the city, about noon, and asked me to look after their furniture, when it's shipped. Hello! Here's your train!"

"And, I may as well go," returned Pryce, thinking, as he took his seat, "that fellow is too evidently the friend—an admirer—of the other, (Wright) to attempt to make use of him. Too much talk, or an offer of money would result in a warning."

"Why does he help those people to 'clear out,' when he was foremost in prosecuting the search for the father, and in seizing the father's property?"

"And this job he has given me. Why so anxious for that name? He forgot himself in his eagerness—didn't say that it was as representative of the company."

"But, I must try and find that reporter, and, through him, this Mrs. Strange."

He took out the paper, intending to read the Abbot article again, but had scarcely begun, when a bantering voice asked:

"Is Lightning Lew interested—about to shed some electrical light on that mysterious affair?"

Turning in surprise, Pryce saw, in the seat behind, a man who had once worked with him, in the U. S. Secret Service—King by name, but called The King, because of his imperious manners.

"Hello, King! Glad to meet you!" exclaimed Pryce, getting up and shaking hands with his former comrade, beside whom he took a seat, continuing:

"Still in the old trade?"

"Yes and no. After you quit the service, I grew sick of it—hadn't a friend there. Then I quarreled with the chief, and that settled it."

"A week later, I secured a position on the New York force—police-detective, you know—and was put on that Abbot affair (about which, I notice, you have not answered me), and, now, my resignation is in order."

"What do you mean? Surely, you are not to be dismissed for failing to find out, as this newspaper insinuates, more than that the man robbed and fled."

"I'm inclined to think it is because I found out too much!" replied The King, with a significant look.

"Yes, that's just it," he continued, and in response to Pryce's doubting, surprised stare, explained:

"Of course, a great deal more was learned than was made public, and I was on the woman's track—just started—when I received a hint to drop it. I didn't, and then came an order from the chief to confine my efforts to the man."

"The order was given three days ago, and I obeyed—but turned over what I knew to a friend, a gentleman who is interested in the case, and to whom I owed my appointment."

"This morning I was called into the private room, shown that article, and asked to explain it. Could not—would not, the chief had it—and

was told that the easiest way out of it, was to resign, which I will do before night."

"Well, that's a sweet story," commented Pryce. "What are you going to do now, my boy?"

"Keep right on with the Abbot affair," laughingly answered The King, adding:

"The story that caused my dismissal will also keep me at work, pending my reinstatement."

"Then, you expect to get back?"

"Oh, yes. The man who procured my appointment, is the same to whom I gave the story, and who will cause my reinstatement when this affair is cleared up."

"Who is this powerful friend, King?" asked Pryce, after a few moments' thoughtful silence.

The King shook his head, and smilingly observed:

"You're asking too much, Lew, and really it's not my secret. If you knew that you'd know, probably, the author of that article."

"By the way, you seemed interested?"

"Yes," assented Pryce, so absently as to attract The King's attention.

He was thinking—the lightning brain had finally obtained something to work upon.

"King," he said, after a few minutes' silence, "I am interested in that Abbot affair, and would give a trifle to know your friend. It would be no small favor, and I wish you would obtain his consent to introducing me."

"I will explain my reason for asking, as soon as you obtain me the introduction," added Pryce, and his earnestness caused the other to reply:

"I will do my best, Lew. Personally, I have no objection to telling you who he is, but he's my employer, as well as friend, and I've no right to tell you (since I know he wishes to remain unknown in this matter), until he says the word."

"That's right enough, King; you ask him, and let me know the result. I'm going to find out who wrote that article, for I am interested in the affair, and bound to know the man who knows so much."

It was Lightning Lew, not friend Pryce, who was talking, and King was quick in recognizing the change.

"Then, my friend might as well consent," he said, with a grave smile, "for it's a case of Boone and the squirrel; but, let me ask, *who are you after*. If I could tell him that, it might make a big difference."

"So there is more than Abbott—somebody else worth looking after," thought Pryce, and aloud:

"That will depend on your friend's answer. At present he's the game I'm hunting."

CHAPTER V.

SUSPICIOUS FRIENDLINESS.

PRYCE'S declaration that King's employer was the man he was after, were his parting words to his friend, for they were at the city depot when he spoke.

"All right, I'll see you this night about it," returned King, and they parted.

It was evening when the detectives returned to the city, but Pryce went to his office, where he found two letters—one from "Mr. Smith's" lawyers, containing a check for one hundred dollars, and the other from Lucy Abbot, announcing that she was about removing to the city.

The new address of the Abbots caused the detective's eyebrows to elevate.

"They must be very poor," he muttered, as he prepared to depart; "I ought to accept these other people's money and send it to them."

It was Pryce's intention not to accept "Mr. Smith's" check, for at present he had some very queer suspicions regarding that gentleman. Draper had not offered any money, but, in lieu of it, an idea had occurred to the detective:

"Why not get Will to help me with the newspaper people?"

William Draper was acquainted with every actor, artist, and writer, worth knowing, in town. He was a millionaire, and could afford to be just a "clever amateur" actor, artist, and writer himself, and had done some really fine work, without revealing his identity until it had been declared better than the average.

Pryce knew all this, and then Draper was particularly well known to, and friendly with, the editor of the paper containing the Abbot article, so when the idea occurred to him, he said:

"Now, if King's man refuses to come to the front, I still have a string to my bow."

At eight that night, King entered Pryce's rooms, and with a deprecating smile, announced:

"It's no go."

"All right!" cheerfully returned the other, "I'll find it out, but he could have saved me a little time."

"Can you tell me who *you are after*?"

"I'll risk that without asking, because you told me that much—I'm looking up Mrs. Strange."

"Thank you. Will you let me know when you find her?"

"Well, I—yes, Lew, I will."

"Once more, thank you."

A ring of the door-bell now announced another visitor, and King departed.

The next visitor proved to be Mr. Draper, who saluted the detective in his usual cheery fashion, and inquired:

"Anything new?"

By way of reply, Pryce handed him the newspaper, and pointing to the Abbot article, asked:

"Have you read that?"

"Oh, yes," replied Draper, "but it's about my draft I inquired."

Shooting a keen glance at his visitor, the detective said:

"Perhaps you are aware that the Abbots are removing from Brookvale?"

"Yes, or rather, I knew that must come since they gave up their home, and everything else they possessed to Wright's company."

"Gave up everything?" repeated Pryce.

"Well, yes, I suppose it was done willingly, but Wright made a demand—attached everything, and anything."

"Why, you are behind the age, old man," laughingly continued Draper.

"I believe you are right, Will," muttered the detective, who was trying to harmonize the young man's statement with the banker's words, "I gave them money to clear out."

Suddenly he looked up, and exclaimed:

"You don't seem to be much behind the age!"

"Oh, I manage to keep posted," modestly admitted Draper.

"And, possibly, know who wrote that article?" suggested Pryce.

"Possibly. I believe I could lay my hand on the man."

"Well, that's just what I want to do!" exclaimed the detective, adding:

"Make sure of your man, and let me know as soon as possible, and you'll do me a big service."

"How?"

"In tracing your hundred thousand-dollar man."

"Sorry, but it's impossible," calmly replied Draper.

"Why, you are in the business to a certain extent!" expostulated Pryce, amazed at the refusal.

"But not to betray its secrets," was the smiling retort.

Lightning Lew had done Draper's father a great service, while in the employ of the Government, through tracing a large number of stolen, and forged, bonds which were nearly foisted on the old gentleman. The latter never forgot Pryce's gratuitous service, and the latter, when in New York, was always a welcome guest of the Drapers.

In this way, he had come to be very familiar with young Draper, whom he seldom addressed by any other title than "Will."

Now, however, the detective instinct was all awake, and, believing implicitly in no person, or thing, the thought flashed through his mind:

"This young man is author of that article!"

In a careless tone, as if the matter was not of much importance, he said:

"Very well, Mr. Draper, I suppose I must do without the information, though it would have helped me."

"How?"

Pryce did not like the smile that accompanied the question, but in the same careless way replied:

"Oh, I hardly know; but the reporter appeared to know a great deal about the case—especially the woman."

"Well, it's that draft, and not Abbot's connection with the woman, that we are after," quietly observed the young man, adding:

"Let me know when you strike anything."

"Good-night."

When his visitor had departed, the detective gave vent to his thoughts:

"Well, young man, you came near fooling me, but you went just a little too far!"

"Now, what in thunder did he write that article for? And, why does he hit at Wright's relationship to the woman, and hers to Abbot, and then want to hold me back?"

"Wright stopped King in the same way—"

"By Jupiter! Is it possible that there can be

any connection between Wright and Draper in this matter?"

He paused a few minutes; then began again:

"It looks like it—very. Both keep track of Abbot's family—both deeply interested in them. One wants to know where Abbot is for old friendship's sake, and the other *merely* to know why a paltry one hundred thousand dollar draft hasn't been cashed, but neither wants him molested!"

The detective was pacing the floor with a slow, measured step, when suddenly another idea occurred to him, and he exclaimed:

"I must warn that girl of Abbot's!"

"Millionaires are not apt to become so interested in girls in her situation, for any good purpose, and Mr. Draper is no better than any other."

"But, how shall I manage it—write?"

After a few moments' thought, Pryce sat down at his desk, and picking up a pen, began a letter to "Miss Lucy Abbot," but that was as far as he went.

"No, it will not do to write!" he decided, as throwing down the pen, he resumed his march up and down the floor.

"If I write, she may be so infatuated with the rascal as to show him the letter. Then the fat would be in the fire, in earnest: he would know I distrusted him, both in this matter and the other."

"No, I must see her, and judge of the effect of my words as they're uttered."

Having decided upon a course of action, Pryce was seldom long in pursuing it, and twenty minutes later was within a block of the new home of the Abbots.

As he turned from the avenue into the cross-street in which the house was situated, the keen-eyed detective caught sight of a familiar figure crossing from the opposite side, and a second glance convinced him it was, as he had guessed, William Draper!

Stepping back into a doorway, the detective watched the young millionaire pass, and saw that the latter had changed his clothes.

"Ha, ha! Now he is the workingman! That accounts for his hurry in leaving me."

Thus muttering, Pryce stepped out of the doorway, and fell in behind his client.

CHAPTER VI.

DRAPER, THE WORKINGMAN.

WE will follow William Draper, "the workingman," into the humble home of the Abbots, which was on the upper story of a small tenement.

This fact decided the course of the detective, who had come up close behind Draper, and had heard the cordial greeting extended to the latter, by both mother and daughter. He would try to overhear what was said.

Draper was evidently talking of the newspaper article—replying to some remark of mother or daughter, and the first words the listener caught were:

"This story cannot do any harm, and it may do a great deal of good. It will give your detective a hint of the relationship existing between this woman, and Wright, but he probably knows all about that already, for I have been inquiring, and find he is a famous man in his profession."

"He's been inquiring!" commented the listener.

"And, you think Mr. Wright has had some hand in this terrible matter?" asked a voice, which Pryce recognized as Lucy's.

"I feel sure of it. His explanations as to how he passed and approved these forged securities do not explain at all, in my opinion, although accepted without hesitation by the directors of the company—because Mr. Wright is such a generous, unsuspecting fellow."

"Oh, Mr. Draper, he is a generous man," interposed another female voice—Mrs. Abbot's. "While, as president of the company, he demanded everything we had, he forced me to accept enough money to buy these things we have, and has promised to find work for us."

"Indeed! So it was not of your own free will your house and furniture were surrendered?" asked Draper, evidently surprised.

"It was not until we arrived here that I knew otherwise," explained Lucy.

"I see. He thought *you* would be too sharp for him, and make some objection, which would bring the matter before the public. That explains why he gives, or loans, money to get you out of Brookvale."

"The miserable hypocrite! Well, he'll hear from that furniture, before he sleeps again."

"Another article in the paper," commented Pryce, while Draper continued:

"There was some object in getting you out of your home, Mrs. Abbot, and especially in getting

hold of your furniture, which, I am pretty sure, he had no legal right to touch.

"Was there any place, or piece of furniture, in which papers might have been secreted?"

"None that I can think of. All his papers were in the desk that was searched, and they were carried off to the company."

"Yes, but the company states that nothing of any value—nothing, in fact, but these bundles of *strange* receipts—was found. Yet, Mr. Abbot drew a large salary, and was supposed to be a wealthy man."

"There was an old cabinet in the garret, but I don't—that is, I am not certain papa used it," said Lucy.

"The furniture is yet in the house, I suppose?" asked Draper.

"I suppose so."

"Then I'm going to have a peep into that cabinet, if I have to play burglar!" declared Draper.

"And I'll be there with you, if not before you!" muttered the detective, hastening downstairs, as he heard Draper preparing to depart.

As he reached the street, the thought came to him:

"This may be a mere bluff—to find out what the women knew. I must wait for him."

It was now ten o'clock, but ten o'clock Saturday night, on the East side, is early. The streets were full of people, and all the shops in full blast.

Pryce did not have long to wait for his man, but had time to reflect that there was no train for Brookvale until midnight, when "the accommodation theater" would leave the Grand Central Depot.

"So, you need not have hurried yourself, my friend," he muttered, as Draper appeared in the doorway.

The latter, however, did not start at once for the depot. Instead, he turned into the avenue, and entered a hardware store.

"Hanged if he don't mean business!" commented the detective, as, peeping through the window, he saw Draper examining a lot of tools.

After ten minutes' waiting, he grew impatient, and peeped in again. The pile of tools had been removed, and, in their place, Draper was now examining several revolvers.

A few minutes later, the young millionaire emerged from the store, and, though carrying nothing, the pockets of his heavy coat bulged suspiciously.

"Now he's fixed, and off for Brookvale!" thought Pryce, but he was wrong. A block further on, Draper entered a small grocery store.

Wondering what was wanted here, Pryce looked in, and saw the grocer measuring off a lot of clothes line. When the required length was cut off, Draper doubled it and knotted it—at intervals of a foot—from end to end. Then, taking from one of his pockets a pair of large iron hooks, he made something like a grapnel at one end.

"For climbing!" exclaimed the detective, as he watched his man wrapping the knotted rope around the hooks.

"By George! That fellow's a born burglar—or detective—or a good combination of both, which makes the best of either."

"And he has, certainly, reasoned and some points which did not occur to me."

Further reflection was cut short by the appearance of Draper, now carrying a neat parcel, and apparently finished with his preparations, for he boarded a cross-town car.

"Off, at last!" muttered Pryce, as he, too, got aboard the car, and being undisguised remained outside.

The detective's rooms were near the depot, and he determined, if he saw Draper enter, to go home, and disguise himself.

At Fourth avenue, the young millionaire jumped off the car, and boarded another, which he left at the depot.

"Now he is safe," thought the detective, seeing his man at the ticket window, and then, for the first time, noticed that Draper had grown a mustache since leaving his (Pryce's) rooms.

"Part of his workingman masquerade costume," muttered Pryce, with a grim smile, as he hurried home.

Having altered his appearance, so that his nearest friend would not have recognized him, the detective returned to the depot, to accompany the young millionaire on his contemplated house-breaking expedition. Mr. Draper, however, was not there.

It took Pryce just ten minutes, to convince himself of this fact.

Then, he looked at the big clock, and seeing it lacked ten minutes of twelve, felt very much relieved.

"He's gone out to get a drink," he decided, but again he was mistaken, for, when the gentleman who announces train departures, began hissing-song: "All 'board f' Broo'v'le, Sco'd'l," etc., Mr. Draper was still missing.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE ABBOT COTTAGE AT MIDNIGHT.

LIGHTNING LEW felt mad—not merely angry, and, when the last moment came, scarcely knew whether to board the train, or go home and kick himself.

Just as the gate was closing, he decided in favor of the train, and dashed through—followed by some fervent remarks from the gateman, because of his delay.

The detective was one of those who snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat.

Before he was half-way to Brookvale, Pryce had decided that, as Draper had abandoned the house-breaking plan, he would have to adopt it. Instead of being merely a witness, he would be the house-breaker!

Having arrived at this decision, he sought the conductor, to ascertain how he could return.

"No train from Brookvale, until eight tomorrow morning," replied the knight of the punch. "but there's trains up and down from P—, constantly. It's only two miles above Brookvale—that's why no trains stop there, except morning, and evening."

"And, I'll bet my head, that's why that 'sharp young rascal isn't on this train,'" muttered the detective, walking back to his seat.

"Sharper than I am, he took the Albany Express, and got off at P—, a good half-hour ago. Now, if I'm not pretty sharp, he'll have been there, and gone, before I get off this abomination-accommodation!"

He did not give himself any credit for having gone on, although, had he hesitated a moment longer about doing so, reaching Brookvale in time would have been hopeless.

As the train slowed up, Pryce jumped off, and was tearing along the River Road before the majority of his fellow-passengers had buttoned up their coats, preparatory to alighting.

Although a man of fifty, the detective was as lively and fleet-footed as many not half his age, and his muscles were like steel.

He did not know the exact location of the Abbot cottage, but had been informed that it was about a mile above Wright's residence, and on the same road.

On, on, he ran, apparently tireless, until, just as he was beginning to fear the house was not on the road, a turn brought it in view.

"He is there!" exclaimed the detective, as his eye caught a light glimmering in one of the upper windows—the garret, undoubtedly.

As he approached the door, Pryce looked for the knotted rope, but it was not in sight.

"The cunning rascal has taken it in, but he wasn't cute enough to pull down the shades."

As the detective muttered this comment, the light of the bull's-eye he was flashing up, and down, and across, the front of the house, fell upon the doorway.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

But, it wasn't; for, on touching the door, it swung back. As his keen eye had discovered, the door had been slightly open.

Pryce's shoes were not particularly light, but he might have been shod in felt, for all the noise he made on the carpeted stairs.

Up, up, one, two, stories. Now, another flight of stairs, narrow and uncarpeted, faces him, and Pryce pauses to remove his shoes.

As he does so, the noise of a man moving about above reaches him quite plainly, and the man-hunter smiles.

He has "got" his man!

Noiselessly the detective steals up the stairs, until his head is level with the floor. Then, he looks around, and, seeing his man in the front, creeps behind an old lounge, from which he can watch the movements of the searcher.

Suddenly he hears a noise, very faint, on the stairs, and, in an instant, the sharp-eared shadow realizes that there is a third person in the house.

Creeping noiselessly to the further end of the lounge, Pryce awaits the appearance of the person whom he is certain is coming.

He has not long to wait, but it is too dark to distinguish the features of the man who, creeping across the floor, takes the position recently occupied by the detective.

"Who can he be?" wonders Pryce, but his attention is quickly attracted by an exclamation from the man in front.

The latter, carrying a long candle, has been roving with his back to the watchers, but, as the detective turns his head, the candle is placed

on top of an old desk, and then, for the first time, Pryce beholds the face of the searcher.

"It is the genial, generous banker!"

A muttered exclamation from his unknown companion suppresses a similar one on the part of the detective, and causes him to wonder: "Who the deuce is this other chap?" while he watches Mr. Wright searching the old desk.

Eagerly, impatiently, the wealthy banker pulls open the drawers, thrusts his hands into dusty pigeon-holes, and finally lifts the cover of the old-fashioned desk.

As he raises the lid an exclamation of joy escapes the banker, to be followed, an instant later, by one of horror, as from above comes an unearthly, mournful cry:

"Lost, lost, lost!"

A man of iron nerve—one who had twice listened, smilingly, to his death sentence as a Union spy, Pryce shuddered, and did not wonder at the terror exhibited by the banker, who shook like a leaf, but seemed rooted to where he stood.

Then, in a solemn, reproachful voice, came the one word:

"Robber!"

And then, apparently out of the solid wall, came the form of the missing cashier.

Hatless, coatless, barefooted—almost naked—with a blood-stained face, and covered with mud, he was a horrifying sight.

Wright had barely a glimpse of his former friend and associate, when, with a shriek of terror, he threw up his arms, and sprung toward the stairs, down which he went tumbling to the bottom.

In throwing out his arms, the terror-stricken banker knocked over the candle, and it was extinguished, leaving the garret in darkness.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

FOR a full minute after the banker's fall, Pryce remained motionless—from astonishment, not fright. Poor as his faith was in things human, he had none at all in the supernatural.

"It's a trick!" he muttered, starting up, and rushing forward, a lantern in one hand, revolver in the other.

If it was a trick, he soon had to admit it was a neat one, for having, by the light of the "bull's-eye," discovered the candle, he lighted it, and looked first for Abbot, but the missing cashier was not to be seen.

There was not much furniture in the garret—the cashier was not the kind of a man to have much there—and search among the few old chairs, and a couple of broken tables, proved unavailing.

Then, the detective looked for the opening, through which Abbot must have escaped, but there was none, nor the sign of one.

A careful sounding of the wall, only served to prove its solidity.

"Oh, curse the luck!" he angrily exclaimed, as he turned away, sorely disappointed, and then as his eye fell upon the desk, he added:

"Well, I've got what they were after, anyhow."

But, here, again, he was doomed to disappointment, for, on raising the cover, one glance showed there nothing underneath, except a few pieces of old wrapping paper.

Then, Lightning Lew indulged in some bad language (mentally), for since he had lost the "ghost," and the papers—for there must have been something in the desk to cause the banker's joyous cry—he was determined to have an interview with his unknown fellow-watcher, and the banker, and talking might disturb them.

"Abbot got away with the papers," he decided, (though how, was still a mystery.) "but I've still got the banker—if he hasn't broken his neck."

Extinguishing the candle, and throwing open the slide of the lantern, Pryce sought the unknown, but he, too, had vanished.

"Scared out of his wits!" he commented; and, with a grim smile:

"Now, for my friend, Mr. Smith!"

He felt pretty certain that the watcher was the young millionaire, and did care much about losing him, for the present.

Flashing his lantern as he descended, the detective looked for the banker at the foot of the stairs, but no one was there.

The hall of the second story was carpeted, and moving about, flashing the light, Pryce's stockinged foot touched a wet spot near the stairs. Stooping, he pressed a finger on it.

"Blood!" he exclaimed, as he held the finger to the light.

"Now, where's the man?" he continued, and,

being satisfied the banker was not in the hall, entered the room just off the foot of the garret stairs.

No one was in the room, and, with a growing conviction that Wright had escaped, with a cut of some kind, the house-searcher explored all the rooms without finding any one.

Then he went back, and cut the wet spot out of the carpet, came down to the parlor, and sat down to think. Also, to watch.

At dawn, he arose from the chair, extinguished his lantern, and after carefully closing the front door, started for the station at P—, muttering:

"It's pretty near the toughest thing ever I've tackled; but I'll see the bottom, if I die for it!"

One of the three passengers who got off the eight o'clock train at Brookvale, Sunday morning, was Pryce. He had waited at P— for that particular train, in order to have a chat with his friend, the ticket agent, and admirer of Mr. Wright.

The waiting room was deserted, and the ticket agent recognized Pryce instantly.

"Ah! Back our way, again, eh?" he said.

"Yes; thought I might as well stop off here for breakfast. Didn't know anybody to ask to keep me company, at P—. Will you join me? I hate to eat alone."

"Thanks—yes—if you can wait a few moments; my assistant is due now," fluttered the agent, delighted with the prospect of breakfasting at the expense of this "swell traveling salesman" who could not eat alone.

"Oh, certainly; I'm in no hurry," assured Pryce, but there was no necessity for waiting, as the assistant entered while he was speaking.

As soon as breakfast was ordered, the agent, as the detective hoped and expected, asked:

"What did you think of Mr. Wright's place?"

"Very fine indeed," replied Pryce, adding:

"I suppose you have the owner here with you, still?"

"No, he returned that night."

"Indeed? I'm sorry for that, because I meant to take a walk around to-day, and, if he was at home, ask permission to look around the premises."

"He hasn't returned, I suppose? You would know, of course."

"Oh, yes, I'd know if he had, but he has not, for I was on all Saturday up to the last train, and, if he had come back, I would know it."

"He went up as far as P— and walked back," thought the detective, and as that was a "ten-minutes-for-refreshment" station, there would be little chance of tracing Wright among the hundred who stopped there daily, so he decided to go on to the city.

Accordingly, breakfast finished, he took leave of the agent, and boarded the next train.

On arriving home, Pryce informed the janitor that he was going on a long journey next day, and, for that reason, did not wish to be disturbed.

"So, I am 'not at home' to anybody, and everybody," he concluded.

"I understand, sir. The boys will be so notified," and, pocketing a half-dollar, the janitor started off, but he was too late to prevent the entrance of one caller, who caught the detective, while the latter was waiting for the elevator.

The caller was William Draper—looking bright, elegant and happy.

"Hello, old man!" he cried, in his usual style. "Saw you coming in, and thought I'd post you on the latest about our banking company."

Pryce looked sharply at the young millionaire, and asked:

"Will you come up?"

"No; haven't time. Good young man now, you know, and must go to church."

"But, about the company: the president slipped in front of his own house, about three this morning, and smashed his skull!"

"Nice state of affairs, eh? First, the cashier goes to smash, morally, and then the president follows suit physically."

"Anything certain about the time and place of the accident?"

Pryce was watching every expression of the other's countenance, but Draper only laughed as he carelessly replied:

"It is a rather suspicious hour for such a respectable old citizen to be knocking around, I admit; but, time and place are as accurate as the policeman who found him reports it."

"But, I must be off. By-by!"

Pryce looked perplexed, as he watched the young millionaire hurrying away, and muttered something that made the colored boy stare, as he entered the elevator.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HANDKERCHIEF—SAM SHARP.

"LIGHTNING LEW! What fool first gave me that name, and why? If ever I deserved it, the time has passed! My brain must be softening."

"Here I've been working a week on a case, and the result is to be laughed at by a young rascal, thwarted by an old one, while another old scoundrel plays ghost with me, and steals papers from under my very nose!"

Thus Pryce mutters, as he strides up and down the floor, after reaching his rooms.

He looks savage, and feels so, and those who were his comrades would declare him to be in an exceedingly dangerous mood—dangerous to the person or persons who caused it.

"Confound them!" he ground out, after another couple turns. "Confound them! They're rousing up the old tiger in me, and I'll eat them yet!"

Another couple of turns up and down the floor, and then, as if coming to a sudden determination, the veteran detective sits down, and begins writing:

"FRIEND JACK:—I want a man—young and sharp—sharp as a needle, and quick as lightning! Can you send me such a man? As you know, I am unacquainted here, and cannot wait to send out of town, so am compelled to ask your assistance in this matter. PRYCE."

The letter was sealed, and addressed to "Mr. John Austin," and summoning a messenger the detective instructed him to deliver it "at once, d'ye understand!"

The tone was sufficient to have upset the boy, but did not apparently, for a half hour later, a bell-boy came to Mr. Pryce's rooms, and announced:

"Gentleman down stairs t' see yo', sah."

"Didn't I leave orders—didn't the janitor tell you, I was 'not at home' to anybody?" demanded the detective, in an irritated tone.

"Yes, sah, 'n' ah said so, but he only laughed at me. Den, ah tole 'im so ag'in, 'n' he said ah wuz foolish t' tell sich stories. So, ah called de janitor, 'n' he said yo' wa'n't home, 'twa'n't no use—gentleman said—"

Just then, the bell-boy was pushed away from the door, and a youth of nineteen, or twenty, entered the apartment, saying:

"You go down—I'll explain the rest."

The colored boy promptly disappeared, while the new-comer advanced and handed Pryce an envelope.

"Why did you not send this by one of the boys?" sternly demanded the detective, without looking at the letter.

"Because it is unsealed," calmly returned the young man.

Pryce looked, saw this was so, then opened and read the following letter;

"This serves to introduce to you, the very man you describe, who, fortunately, happened to be with me when your letter arrived."

"He is Sharp by name, and sharp by nature. Knowing your opinion of appearances, and recommendations, I will say no more."

"AUSTIN."

Austin and Pryce had been comrades in the Secret Service, and the latter had a very good opinion of the former, both as a man, and as a detective, but he shook his head and looked doubtful, on seeing how literally the "young man" requirement had been filled.

"I'm afraid you are too young," he said, in a kindly tone.

"How old would you like to have had me?" quietly asked the young man.

"Oh, well, somewhere between twenty-five, and thirty."

"Very well, sir. You shall have some one very soon. Good-morning!"

"Bright-looking chap!" commented the detective. "Sorry he was so young, for he looks as if his name fitted him."

A knock on the door, a few minutes later, interrupted his reflections, and, supposing it was another bell-boy, he bade him come in, without turning or looking around.

"I've come from Mr. Austin, sir!" announced a deep, baritone voice.

Pryce now came around with a jump, and saw a handsome, dark-mustached man of about twenty-eight, wearing gold eye-glasses, through which gleamed a pair of piercing eyes.

"You had Sam Sharp here a few minutes ago, and, possibly, he suited you. If not, I am to take his place," continued the visitor.

"How did you get past the janitor?" asked Pryce, suspiciously, and inspecting the visitor sharply.

"Oh, I had no trouble with him," was the careless reply.

"What is your name, sir?"

"Smith, sir—at present," calmly replied the other, looking straight at the questioner.

"Humph! Well, sit down, Mr. Smith, and I'll tell you what is wanted of you. Upon how you perform the work—and it should not take you more than four or five hours to do it—will depend whether you or Sam Sharp shall serve me in the matter I have on hand."

"Here are the names of two people, and their addresses, together with what I want to know about them," continued the elder detective, handing Smith a slip of paper.

The latter glanced at the paper, placed it in a note-book, and picking up his hat, said:

"Good-morning, Mr. Pryce."

Pryce started, and muttered:

"Well, you are cool enough, anyhow."

After a minute's reflection, he summoned the janitor, and, when that autocratic gentleman appeared, said, very severely:

"Mr. Brown, I notified you that I wished to be undisturbed to-day, and yet you have permitted two callers to come here."

"Two? I beg pardon, Mr. Pryce, only one, and that one having entered the elevator, defied any one to remove him. There were ladies coming, and I could not make a disturbance; so—"

"But, there was another—one who has just left me?" and Pryce described Smith.

"Know nothing about him, sir, I assure you. He certainly did not ask for you."

"Ah! That explains your apparent negligence. Well, you will know that gentleman when he calls again, of course?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly."

"Good. Here is a dollar to assist your memory, and be certain that he is not permitted to call on me."

"I'll attend to it, sir. You may rest assured if he tries to play any games—going to call on somebody else, or anything of that sort, I'll stop it."

"Now, Mr. Smith, we'll see whether you'll have any trouble with the janitor!" chuckled Pryce, and summoning a bell-boy, asked:

"You will be on duty this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you should see Mr. Brown about to put out a man calling for me, tell him to wait until you have inquired about him. Then, come and inform me."

"Yes, sir."

Throwing himself on a lounge, Pryce, tired with his night's work, soon fell asleep.

The clock on the mantel was just chiming two, when he was awakened by a thundering knock on his door, and, then, in marched Mr. Brown, and Mr. Smith—in the order named.

"I couldn't help it, Mr. Pryce! I couldn't help it! He said he'd blow the roof—" began the janitor.

"Shut up, and get down to your work!" ordered Smith, and the janitor skulked out.

"What does this mean?" demanded the old detective, apparently indignant.

"Nothing of any account, sir, I assure you."

"Let's see! It was eleven when I left, and it's now two—I'm at least an hour ahead."

"Now, for my report:

"First: Mr. Wright was picked up" at his own door, or rather, on the lowest step of the stoop, bleeding slightly from a wound in the back of the head, but conscious.

"That comes from Policeman Number 078, who picked him up."

"Mr. Wright is badly hurt, but seems to be suffering more from some shock or fright than from the wound, although his doctor—Tayre—says that that is bad, even dangerous."

"That comes from Doctor Tayre's assistant."

"Second: Mr. Draper was here about eight last night, and went hence to the New York Club, where he played billiards until ten—"

Here Pryce interrupted the report, by a negative shake of the head.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but that is—absolutely—correct. I was there myself, and saw him."

"You! How came you there? Are you a member?"

"No, but Mr. Austin is, and, knowing I was interested in billiards, he brought me there to see a match-game between Mr. Draper and another gentleman."

"Mr. Draper won, and they—"

"That will do, Smith," interrupted the old detective, with a sigh. "If Draper was playing billiards at ten o'clock last night, I don't care for the rest, but are you sure of what you say—are you sure it's the same man?"

"There is only one William Draper, who is a millionaire, and who belongs to the New York Club," replied Smith, very quietly, "and, that is the man who was there at ten last night. This

morning's papers will inform you that he played, and won, the match at that hour."

Pryce remained silent for several minutes, buried in thought, from which he was roused by Smith, who said:

"There is one thing I wish to say on my own account, Mr. Pryce—Wright was not injured where he was found!"

"Eh? Why do you think so?" cried the old detective, eagerly.

"Because I found this in the gutter, in front of the house," explained Smith, drawing a blood-stained handkerchief, from his pocket.

"As you see," he continued, "the corners have been knotted to make a bandage, and in one of those corners is the initial 'W,' while Wright told the officer he had just fallen."

"Hurrah!" cried Pryce, starting up, "you've upset one theory, but you've confirmed a more important one! Smith, you're a brick!"

"No, sir, if you please, I'm Sam Sharp!"

CHAPTER X.

SAM'S ORDERS—LEW'S PREPARATIONS.

SMITH'S announcement that he was Sam Sharp, did not appear to surprise the old detective very much, for, laughing merrily, he asked:

"What did you think caused such opposition to your second entrance?"

"Just what I thought when leaving: that you suspected who I was."

"Right, my boy! And Jack did not exaggerate your sharpness!"

"Now, I've got work, and plenty of it, for you to do."

"First, and as soon as possible, find out if the William Draper who calls on the Abbots—I'll give you the address—and the William Draper you saw last night, are the same, and, if not, who, and what, the other one is."

"Next, try to ascertain whether Wright was in the city Saturday night, at twelve o'clock."

"Next, take this handkerchief, and a piece of carpet, which I will give you, to a good chemist and have him analyze the blood-stains to determine whether it is the same blood."

"I will not return to these rooms, but will send you an address, where you can report."

"I am going to Brookvale—to Abbot's house—to-night, and don't know how soon I may return."

"It wouldn't do to report there in case of an important discovery!" suggested Sam.

"Possibly under cover of darkness, it might be done," replied Pryce, thoughtfully, adding:

"But, it must be of vital importance, my boy, for I'm beginning to think that we are going to work against desperate, and powerful, odds. There is more in that Abbot affair than appears on the surface, Sam—much more."

The veteran detective then gave his young assistant, a full account of the case as far as he had gone, together with his own ideas, and suspicions, concluding with:

"So, should anything happen to me, you will be able to take up the thread where I drop it."

"Be careful of yourself—and trust nobody."

With this warning ringing in his ears—for it was an earnest one, and typical of the man—Sam, no longer on probation, started to work up his end of the mysterious disappearance of Cashier Abbot.

The two detectives had been in conversation about two hours, and, as soon as Sam was gone, Pryce began his preparations for departure.

His clothing and disguises he packed in two large trunks, to which he attached tags bearing the address of his friend Austin.

One suit only was reserve!—of which, the old-fashioned, long black frock coat, when donned, made his already tall, bony frame, appear six inches taller.

"Just for luck," he said, slipping it on, and, then, placing an equally old slouch hat on his head, surveyed himself in the glass.

"Looks like old times," he smilingly commented, as he affixed a long gray mustache, and imperial.

Pryce was now costumed, as he was when known as Lightning Lew, though not even his comrades suspected that mustache, and imperial, were false.

After a few moments, the disguise was removed, and packed in a hand-bag, in which he had already placed a change of underclothing.

In this hand-bag, was next placed an extra revolver, with a box of cartridges, a screw-driver, a sectional jimmy, a small package of giant powder, and two dynamite cartridges!"

It was Lightning Lew, now—and out for blood!

He had sworn that morning to solve the mystery of Abbot's appearance, and disappearance in the garret of the cottage, if he had to blow that structure and himself into atoms!

That was one reason—and the principal one—why he had confided so unreservedly in Sam.

"If I catch Abbot, I'll find those papers, or whatever it was, that made Wright so happy," he reasoned, "and, with the finding of those, I'll learn the secret of Wright's terror."

"Abbot is hiding in, or near, the cottage, and is bound to come back—probably has supplies there, and is waiting for the affair to die out, and I'll get him, if I have to lift the roof."

"But, that Wright? He's the dangerous man, undoubtedly, and there's no telling what he may do. I wish there was some one to keep an eye on him, and his people. I'll write Sam to do it, as soon as he's through with Draper."

"That fellow's a puzzle, too. If he isn't the man, who is the 'double?' Well, he's not important, and I can trust Sam with that."

That ended Lightning Lew's soliloquy, and, after dinner at a near-by restaurant, he started for Brookvale.

Instead of getting off at that station, he went on to P—, bought a big parcel of supplies, and walked back to the Abbot cottage.

The door yielded to his touch, but he was too wary a bird to be deceived by that.

Standing on the side of the doorway furthest from the knob, and leaving only his hand exposed, the detective gently pressed back the door.

The necessarily slow moving of the heavy door, caused the hinges to creak loudly, and, when it was half-way open, the man hunter paused to listen.

A slight noise—so slight that, at first, he thought it imagination—had reached him, but, now, listening in the silence, it came again, and more distinctly.

It was the sound of a person walking back and forth, very lightly—as if in slippers, or barefooted—and the listener's mind instantly reverted to Abbot. The sound came from a distance, just where, or how far, Pryce could not determine, until a sudden jar, caused by the walker's knocking against a piece of furniture, revealed his presence on the floor above.

"Now, I've got him!" thought the detective, as he slipped off his shoes, and with a revolver in one hand, and lantern in the other, stepped softly into the hall.

The place was shrouded in darkness, and he moved cautiously, flashing his light on every side, but 'twas all of no avail. He had not gone five yards, when one foot was caught in, or by, something, and he measured his length on the floor.

The revolver exploded, and flew in one direction, and the lantern in another.

The man lay still.

CHAPTER XI.

FIRING AT A GHOST.

FOR two or three minutes after falling, the detective did not stir. He was not hurt, although badly shaken up, but kept quiet, expecting some move on the part of the person above.

With Pryce's fall, the walking ceased, and, finding it did not recommence, he groped about until he found the lantern. This, being relighted, discovered to him a wire stretched across the hall, close to the floor.

The detective smiled as he saw the cause of his fall, but it was not a pleasant smile, and as he picked up the revolver, and replaced the exploded cartridge, his eyes kept roving between the point where the wire was stretched and the foot of the stairs.

Not a sound had come from above, and his movements below had been noiseless.

"More trap-door ghost business," he murmured, contemptuously, and, as he stepped over the wire, measured the distance between it and the stairs, which he ascended as lightly as a cat.

Just around the turn on the next floor he felt another wire, for he had shut off the light after crossing the first obstruction.

Lightning Lew was absolutely fearless, but he was not fool enough to make a target of himself for an enemy sheltered by darkness by carrying an exposed light.

He felt half certain that the walker was no longer on that floor, but half certainties "don't go" to the wary detective, so the hunter leaned against the wall, and waited, and listened, for some presence-betraying sound of the game.

For ten minutes nothing broke the silence, but Pryce was as patient as he was courageous, and a minute more brought his reward—some person

began moving about on the floor above, and not cautiously, as before.

"That fellow must think he owns this house," he commented, as the noise of furniture being moved about reached him, and then came the thought:

"Isn't this fellow just leading me on?"

It certainly looked that way, and concluding he was being led into a trap, the detective decided to make the would-be trapper seek him, so, descending as cautiously as he had come, the hall wire was passed in safety.

The door was still open, and, stepping outside, he picked up his handbag and package of supplies, after which he re-entered, closing the door noiselessly.

Using his lantern now, to avoid the furniture, Pryce entered the parlor, placed his bag and parcel on the mantel, and took a chair, which happened to be in the middle of the floor, and directly facing the door.

Sitting in this position, his eyes having become accustomed to the darkness, the detective could just distinguish the outline of the stairs.

"So, when my ghostly, wire-stretching friend gets tired amusing himself with the furniture, and comes down to see what's become of me, I'm pretty certain to be ready to shed some light on him—and through him, too, unless he's down on his marrowbones in a hurry!"

Thus mused the angry man-hunter, as, with one forefinger ready to spring the slide of the lantern, and the other to pull the trigger of his revolver, he sat awaiting the expected visitor.

For a short time, the noise above increased, causing the watcher to smile—that same wicked smile—and mutter:

"Getting impatient, eh?"

Soon after, there was a grand crash, as if some large picture had fallen, then, the noises ceased altogether.

"Now, Lew, old man, keep your eye peeled!" he muttered, after several minutes' silence.

Bent slightly forward, with both eye and ear on the alert, the detective awaited the appearance of the "ghost."

Five, ten minutes passed without sight, or sound, of the expected visitor, and, then, it occurred to the watcher that there might be a rear stairway, by which the parlor floor might be reached, unheard and unseen. If so, and the rear parlor door was open, he might be approached, and stricken down, while watching through the front door!

He strained his eyes toward the rear door, but it was impossible to make out whether it was closed, or open, and he turned the lantern on it.

It was closed, and, with a feeling of relief, Pryce turned again to the stairs—and there to his amazement stood Abbot! Bloodstained, smeared with mud, bareheaded, barefooted, and almost naked, the ex-cashier was an appalling sight!

It is all very good to laugh and ridicule such things, but to meet them face to face, alone, in a dark, deserted house, is quite another thing, and iron-nerved as he was, the old detective shuddered.

Was it the wanted cashier or his apparition?

Recovering himself in a moment, he called to Abbot to "stand!" and raised his revolver.

The figure looked threatening, and seemed about to leap over the rail. Less than ten feet separated them, and Pryce cried:

"Stand, or I fire!"

Another threatening movement was the response, and bang! went the revolver.

The detective was an expert shot, but Abbot, or his ghost, made no sign of being hurt.

The revolver was self-cocking; and, enraged at his failure, Pryce fired again and again—five times in succession—and when the last shot was fired, the figure turned, and glided up-stairs.

CHAPTER XII.

LIGHTNING LEW'S TRAP.

FOR a few minutes, the detective sat unnerved—unable to move. He had faced almost everything, except the supernatural, without flinching, but, now, for the moment, he felt cowed.

After a little while, he recovered himself, and going to his package, took out a bottle of liquor. He had not bought it for that purpose—would have laughed at the idea—but, now, he was glad to have it.

Unlike those who use it habitually, the effect of the liquor on Pryce was magical, and picking up his lantern, he walked to the stairway, and examined the wall for traces of his shots, as coolly as if it were a practice target.

"Abbot, (or the appearance of Abbot,) had stood on the stairs, in a line with the center of

the doorway, and in the wall exactly where his breast would, (or should,) be, were two holes about an inch apart—one larger than the other.

Pryce knew what that meant, but, to make sure, took out his penknife, and dug five bullets, flattened together, from the larger hole. He did not bother with the other.

Then, he sat down to think it all over.

There was no use hurrying up-stairs. If the thing was natural—a trick—the time for that was past. If supernatural, it was useless.

The detective expert had always ridiculed everything even approaching the supernatural, and, now that he had recovered control of his nerves, was still inclined to do so, notwithstanding his past and present experience in that house.

"It was a trick," he explained, after going over the whole affair. "It was a trick, just as the other was, and I'll find out how it's done, if it takes all winter."

He had several wax candles in his package, and lighting one of these, placed it on a table, which he drew near him.

"I'll see no more of that gentleman to-night," decided Pryce, but, by way of precaution, laid his revolver, and lantern, on the table beside him.

Feeling perfectly sure that the "ghost" was gone for the night, he placed his elbow on the table, and with his hand under his jaw, and a cigar between his teeth, started in for a good "think."

Even had he been safe at home, sleep would have been impossible. Now, that he was thoroughly aroused, there was no rest for him, until the mystery was solved.

Daylight found him still at it, and with a half-formed resolution to telegraph for Sam.

"That boy is sharp," thought the old detective, as the light came streaming in, "and could watch below, while I took care of that infernal garret."

Getting up and closing the blinds, he sought the kitchen to ascertain what hope there was of preparing coffee, and to his intense delight found several dirty dishes on the table, as well as coal and ashes scattered about the floor in front of

the range.

"Well," he began in a comically solemn way, "it's just what I've always stuck to—chance does more than brains! Columbus discovered America looking for a shorter route to the East Indies; Newton gravitation through seeing an apple fall while loafing under the tree—electricity, steam—everything the same way—and, now, after spending the whole night trying to think how to trap my 'ghost,' I come in here, looking for hot coffee, and here's the trap all ready!"

"My 'ghost' must eat, and he can't afford to go very far to do it. No woman ever left a kitchen in this shape. Ergo, my 'ghost' eats here—and to-night winds up his ghostly career."

Kindlings were plentiful, and soon water was boiling for the coffee, of which the bundle contained a bottle already prepared, and while going for this, and his other supplies, Pryce kept chatting to himself in great good humor.

"Ah, Lew, old man, you are in luck! Now, we will secure the key to the 'ghost' business, Wright's joy over what he saw in the desk, and his terror on beholding Abbot."

"And," reflectively, "what a queer affair this is, where a fellow is trying to catch one client, who is accused of being a thief, and, by doing so, expose another client, whom he suspects is a thief! Beats all! Durndest case I ever tackled!"

While eating his breakfast, the detective's eyes roved all over the kitchen, and everywhere found traces of its being used by a man—and a careless, dirty man at that.

"I guess I'll put in the day searching for the secret door—no, I might scare him. I'll go and take a snooze, now that my mind's easy."

Removing all traces of his presence, he sought one of the bedrooms, where, having locked and bolted the door, he threw himself on the bed, and soon was sound asleep, unconscious of the danger he was then in, and of more fast approaching him from New York.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. JUNIPER AND "THE BUTCHER."

ABOUT the time the detective fell asleep, a little man, wrapped up in a big coat, who had been shivering outside the door of the Abbot cottage all night, got tired of waiting for Pryce, and hastening to the railroad station, sent the following despatch, addressed to Mr. Smith's lawyers:

"Stranger in house. Pistol-shot last night. What are orders?"

"JUNIPER."

"Send the answer there—that's my name,"

said the little man, handing the clerk a slip of paper on which was written:

"JAMES JUNIPER,

"Blundell House."

The Blundell House was the only hotel in Brookvale, so, of course, the clerk knew where the answer was to be sent, yet he stared at Mr. Juniper, and repeated, in an absent sort of a way, the names of both man and house.

"Yes—can't you read?" asked Mr. Juniper very sharply, adding:

"Perhaps you'd like to have the key to that?"

The clerk turned away, without replying, and sitting down sent off the message. When he was finished, and the paper stuck on the hook, Mr. Juniper warned:

"See that the answer is delivered immediately after you receive it! I shall trace the time of sending to, and receipt by, you."

The operator nodded, and Mr. Juniper went to the Blundell House, and having breakfasted went to bed.

At noon, the answer came over the wire:

"Report to 3:40 train, and return."

"That fellow's a sly one," muttered the operator, as he wrote out the message. "Wanted to give me the idea that it was something in cipher. 'Why it's as plain as day, he's to report to somebody coming up on the 3:40 train, and then go back to New York.'"

"But, where was the pistol-shot last night?"

Still pondering over Mr. Juniper's message, the operator sent a boy to the Blundell House with the answer.

Three-thirty, found Mr. Juniper in the waiting-room of the Brookvale Station, and when, ten minutes later, the train stopped, he rushed out on the platform—only to turn back with a snort of disgust, on seeing that two ladies, and a gentleman, were the only passengers who alighted.

"When does the next train from New York stop here?" he demanded of the ticket agent.

"Four-forty."

Looking very angry, and displeased, the little man sought consolation at the bar of the hotel until 4:30, when he returned to the station.

It was growing dark, so Mr. Juniper was compelled—or felt that he was—to remain on the platform until the 4:30 train arrived, which he did, and, I regret to say, passed the time in swearing at the man whom he had expected to meet on the arrival of the 3:30 train.

During the ten minutes waiting, the little man worked himself into such a rage, that, hardly waiting for the dozen, or more, passengers to get off, he dashed into the waiting-room, and dispatched to the private address of each member of the firm, of which he was managing clerk, the following message:

"Not on three forty, nor four forty. What are orders?"

Had Mr. Juniper remained on the platform ten seconds longer he would have seen a big, rough-looking fellow, who had evidently waited for the others to get off, jump from the rear car, just as the train started.

The big man looked around expectantly, and seeing no one, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and began marching up and down the platform.

After ten minutes of this exercise, the big man grew impatient, and pulling his hat down still further, peeped into the waiting-room—just half a minute too late to see Mr. Juniper pass through the door on the opposite side.

Then the big man's wrath exploded, and he cursed the little man just as long, and as fervently, as the latter had, a short time before, cursed him, so they were even.

Having thus relieved himself, the big man stood for a few minutes on the end of the platform, facing the main street, apparently considering whether he should return to the city, or go on with the business which had brought him to Brookvale.

"I've a durn good mind t' go straight back," he muttered, "though, I don't s'pose he could tell me anythin' more'n how t' get t' the crib, an' I reckon that ain't no trouble t' find out."

Thus began the deliberations of the big fellow—whom his pals, and the Metropolitan police, titled The Butcher, because of his ferocious use of the knife.

He was a keen rascal, in his way, and in a few minutes decided to go ahead with his work, for, he muttered:

"I'll git all the more out of it, for doin' the job, an' findin' the crib alone."

A youth of sixteen, or seventeen, happened to be passing at the moment, and the Butcher hailed him with:

"Say, young feller! Kin ye tell me where a party named Abbot lives?"

"I can tell you where Abbot *did* live," replied the youth, looking curiously at the questioner.

Fully prepared for both answer and look, the Butcher asked:

"Where is it? A gent as I axed fur a few coppers, said if I'd find Mr. Abbot's residence, I'd git plenty."

The youth laughed heartily, and replied:

"I'm sorry to tell you that your chances of getting anything from Abbot are mighty slim. He *did* live in a cottage about a mile up that road, but he's probably in Canada now."

"Well, it's a rough kind of a joke t' play on a poor tramp that ain't bak nothin' t' eat since yest'd'y, ain't it, young feller?" whined the Butcher.

"Yes, it is," agreed the youth, and taking a nickel from his pocket, added:

"Here's all I've got—if I had more—"

"Thank ye, thank ye!" interrupted the Butcher, taking the proffered coin, and to avoid his profuse thanks, the youth hurried away—just as Butcher intended he should.

"Now, I've got the crib located," muttered the big ruffian, as he started down the river road.

He would have liked to do several things—take a drink over the hotel bar, and a hot dinner over the hotel table, for instance, but his orders were strict, and the penalty of disobedience too great, to admit of his risking either—not to speak of what recognition might cost him in the future.

What the latter *might* be, may be judged from part of the soliloquy he indulged in while refreshing himself with some bread and meat, and a bottle of whisky, when half way to the Abbot cottage.

"Ah, old boy," he muttered, looking at the knife with which he was cutting his food. "Ah, old boy, I've saved a 'sixer' for you already, an' this 'll be a fortune, a lifer, or the rope!"

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

It was about eight o'clock when Lightning Lew fell asleep, and he slept on until two in the afternoon, when he suddenly awoke with an indefinable sense of danger.

"There is something wrong!" he muttered, springing up, but everything was quiet, and, apparently, the same as when he fell asleep, six hours before.

Still, he could not get rid of the feeling of danger, and to occupy his mind, the detective descended to the parlor floor, where it suddenly occurred to him that he had forgotten his hand-bag. One glance at the mantel showed him it was gone!

"Hal! my friend has been around—I could smell it in the air!" exclaimed Pryce.

"I misjudged his sleeping hours. He was asleep, while I was sitting here thinking, and, probably, was watching me, when I went up to bed."

"Well, if he gets 'monkeying' with that giant-powder or dynamite, this affair is mighty apt to wind up in a cloud of smoke."

The remainder of the provisions bought at P— had been secreted in the cupboard in the kitchen, and Pryce sought them—not to eat, but to confirm his suspicion that he had been watched during the morning.

With every sense on the alert, the old detective descended to the kitchen, without seeing or hearing anything suspicious, and stooping, looked into the bottom of the cupboard.

A glance showed him that the provisions—eggs, meat and bread—were untouched, but a slight noise caused him to start back and look around, even as he stooped.

Against the opposite wall, facing the cupboard, stood a large piece of furniture, like a wardrobe, and, drawing his revolver, Pryce endeavored to open it, but found it was locked.

The bag contained all his keys and lock-picks, and, although keenly alive to the danger of his situation, the noise had been so slight that the detective did not think it worth while to force the lock.

"Bah! It was imagination!" he muttered, after looking on either side, and in front, to see that there were no air-holes, and went up-stairs to the parlor, forgetting that the top of the wardrobe did not reach the ceiling.

These little oversights generally are costly.

Although there were no houses near the cottage, Pryce did not care to risk going out, and on reaching the parlor, looked about for a book, with which to pass the time until evening.

On a small marble-top table were the only books visible—two Bibles, and picking up the

much larger and older one, he opened it with a feeling of curiosity.

The old detective was a man with a history too queer and wonderful to be even hinted at here, and this was the first time in his life that he had ever opened a book of a religious nature.

That act saved him from paying with his life for his oversight in the kitchen.

Always an unbeliever in anything he could not at least see and feel, he had simply laughed at the idea of a hereafter—although too sensible to force his opinions on any one, and never expressing them unless invited to do so.

Now, however, he became interested, and soon took the cumbersome book from the table, and placing it on his knees, continued his reading.

By and by it began to grow dark, and lighting the candle, which still remained on the table, he continued reading the wonderful story, until his eyes and back both pained him, and he straightened up.

As he did so a gaunt, wild, horrible-looking being who had been standing behind the detective for some time, raised an iron window bar and struck at the tired reader—struck to kill, and certainly would have, had not the book slipped from Pryce's knees at that instant.

As the bar came down with crushing force, the old detective plunged forward to save the book, and instead of killing, the blow only stunned him, although he bled quite freely from a superficial wound, caused by the glancing blow.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the wild man. "One less of Wright's myrmidons!"

He raised the bar again, this time to finish the career of Lightning Lew, but the blow was arrested by a heavy fall, followed by cries of pain, mingled with outrageous oaths and curses.

"Another!" cried Abbot, for it was the missing cashier, and, skipping lightly across the floor, found the Butcher sitting up, and trying to arise, but unable to do so, having sprained his ankle in falling over the wire.

The Butcher greeted Abbot's appearance with a roar—half-fear, half-rage—but it was his last.

One terrible blow of the iron bar, and the Butcher's skull was crushed in, like an empty egg-shell.

"Now for the other—I must finish him!" exclaimed Abbot, laughing gleefully over his deadly, murderous work.

CHAPTER XV.

SAM'S DISCOVERY.

ON leaving Lightning Lew, Sam Sharp went directly to the vicinity of the address of the Abbots.

"If he's badly gone," reasoned Sam, "he'll be either coming home with her or coming to see her pretty soon."

His reasoning, however, was incorrect—for he was on the corner, commanding a view of the entrance of the house where the Abbots resided, from half-past four until eight o'clock, before his man appeared.

It was anything but pleasant work, this watching and waiting.

To begin with it was January, and bitter cold, so, to keep warm, he had to keep moving. Then Sam's natty appearance attracted attention, and it was fortunate for him that the snow had been cleared away the day before.

As it was "de gang" made many personal, and by no means pleasing, remarks regarding him, and his reasons for being in the neighborhood, but Sam had "been there" himself, and, after a little while, his sharp retorts caused a reaction in his favor, which was lucky, for otherwise he could not have remained after dark.

Shortly after eight o'clock Sam saw his man enter the residence of the Abbots.

"It's him, and yet it isn't," muttered Sam, but, unlike the old detective, he was there to prove that this William Draper, and the young millionaire, were not the same person.

So, Sam looked for points of difference, not resemblance, but found none, that is, nothing definite, save the mustache, and that amounted to nothing. He was, himself, wearing a false one.

"Well, no matter, I'm with him now, and before I'm through the question will be settled," muttered Sam.

It was settled in a very short time, and an unexpected manner.

William Draper, workingman, had been upstairs about ten minutes, when Sam noticed a man, on the opposite side of the street, walking back and forth in a suspicious manner. Suspicious, because he kept in front of the Abbot residence, (toward which he was constantly turning his head,) and, avoided coming into the light.

"That fellow's been shadowing Draper, and he's waiting for him," decided Sam.

He himself was now leaning carelessly on the railing at the entrance, as if he belonged to the house, having determined to have a close look at his man, as the latter passed out.

"Confound it!" muttered Sam, as he watched the 'Shadow,' moving back and forth, but always turning his head toward the house, "that fellow doesn't know his own business, and is doubling the labor of mine."

Just then, the man across the street stopped for a few moments, and lighted a cigar.

"Caesar's ghost! It's the original Jacobs—Draper himself!" ejaculated Sam.

"Sol! The girl was right—there are two Mr. Drapers, and the millionaire condescends to shadow the workingman!"

"Well, I guess I can take care of the two Dromios."

Sam now heard some one coming down the bare stairs, and there being no longer any necessity of seeing the "workingman," he walked up the street.

In less than a minute, the "workingman" passed, and Sam stopped, under pretense of lighting a cigar, to allow the millionaire to renew his shadowing.

As he stopped, Sam was astounded to see, that, instead of shadowing his double the millionaire was entering the house the former had just left, and a light broke upon him:

"They are rivals!" he exclaimed, hurrying after the "workingman."

The latter went direct to the office of the newspaper in which the Abbot article had appeared, where he remained a half hour, which Sam utilized by getting into conversation with the elevator man.

"Was that Mr. Peck—just went up?" asked Sam, when the elevator descended after carrying the "workingman" to the editorial rooms.

"Peck? No that was Mr. Draper."

"Oh, much obliged—looked like Peck. By the way—didn't Mr. Draper work on *The Boomer*, before coming here?"

Sam looked, and acted, as if he might be "in the business," and for that reason the elevator man unhesitatingly replied:

"No, not that I know of. I guess you're thinking of his cousin, the millionaire. He does a little bit now and then, and thereby gets credit for ten times as much matter, and a hundred times better stuff."

"How's that?"

"Well, you see, they're the same name, and the swells all give the millionaire credit especially for the magazine articles, and the art and dramatic criticisms in the newspapers, all of which are our man's work—at any rate, all that's any good."

"That's rather rough," sympathized Sam, taking his cue from the other's indignant tone.

"Rough! Say, that ain't nothin' to what I've heard among the men, right in this here car—"

"Hello! There goes the bell—must go up! It would make a 'good story,' if somebody would write it up."

"Well, I'll drop in another night, when you're not busy, and see what's in it," returned Sam, and handing the elevator man a cigar, hurried out of the hall, fearing it might be Draper who was coming down.

In a few minutes the "workingman" came out, and started up-town on a horse car.

Sam entered the car, and, taking a seat in the darkest corner, began studying his man, who soon was buried in thought.

It was an Eighth avenue car, and by the time Fifty-ninth street was reached, there were but three passengers left; Draper, Sam, and another who got on immediately after the former—for the young bloodhound knew too much to scare his game before he was ready to fire.

"He's better—more manly-looking than his namesake," decided Sam.

He was snuggled up in the corner, coat-collar turned up, hat pulled down, and with one hand under his jaw, appeared to be half-asleep, but was never more wide-awake, than half a minute after coming to the conclusion just recorded regarding "the workingman."

As the car was approaching 59th street, a shrill whistle uttered by the third passenger, who was on the rear platform, attracted Sam's attention.

Glancing cautiously through the window, the young detective, with a start of surprise, recognized in the whistler, a notorious Italian criminal—Pietro Vanucci.

The whistle which attracted Sam's attention,

was evidently a signal, for it brought a roughly-dressed man running to the car. He jumped aboard the rear platform and entered into conversation with Vanucci.

"What the deuce are they jabbering about?" wondered Sam, who could neither hear nor understand what the Italians were talking about.

Half a minute after, the conductor left the Italians alone on the platform, and Sam, who felt an unaccountable interest in them, shot another cautious glance through the window—just in time to catch Vanucci make a motion as if striking, at the same time pointing toward Draper.

"By George! What's going on against 'the workingman?' That fellow means mischief, but, by the Lord Harry! I'll have a word or two to say about it."

Having come to this conclusion and determination, Sam settled down to decide what course he should pursue.

"If I speak to him," [Draper] argued the young man-hunter, "Pietro will probably hold off for a better opportunity, while I can hardly say much without giving myself away."

"No, I'll be on hand if they attempt to hurt him, and even if it does spoil my game for tonight, I'll spoil theirs, and get on friendly terms with my 'man' in the bargain."

Having come to this decision, Sam kept watch on the Italian who kept "jabbering" away until 92d street was reached, where Draper left the car.

Half a block further on, the Italians jumped off, and at the next corner Sam followed suit.

As the young detective alighted, he saw the Italians turning down 92d street on a run.

"I hope to goodness I haven't made a mistake in not warning him!" was Sam's muttered exclamation, as he started after the assassins—for such they were—at full speed.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAM AND THE "WORKINGMAN."

ROUNDING the corner, Sam was compelled to slacken his speed, which was fortunate, for as he turned into the street, there stood Pietro.

The young detective had drawn his revolver as he ran, and a lightning glance down the street caused him to use it at once.

Draper was close to a lamp-post about the middle of the block, and stealthily approaching him, with an upraised knife, was Pietro's companion.

Still running, Sam struck the "boss" assassin a powerful blow, knocking him into the gutter. At the same instant, continuing on his course down the street, he fired a shot to warn Draper.

The warning came in the nick of time.

Startled by the shot, Draper jumped aside as he turned, and the assassin's stroke missed its mark.

Disconcerted by his failure, the Italian turned to fly, but Sam was now on him, and before he could use the knife, had treated him like the "boss," except that he used the butt of his revolver this time.

"Pretty close call!" puffed Sam, as the Italian went down like a log.

"Gad! I should think it was!" returned Draper. "Can you add to my debt of gratitude by explaining what it all means?"

"It means that somebody wants you out of the way!" was the blunt reply.

"But there's no time for talking," added Sam. "Slip these handcuffs on that fellow, while I get the other."

But the other was not there. Pietro had seen the failure of the attack, and, having no desire to be locked up, hurried away, while Sam was talking to Draper.

"Stole away, eh?" said the latter, guessing what had happened on seeing Sam returning alone, adding:

"That was my fault—detailing you with questions."

"Well, we've got one of the scoundrels, anyhow," returned Sam, and seeing that the Italian was now feigning unconsciousness, ordered him to get up.

"What's the programme?" asked Draper.

"Oh, lock him up; that's about all can be done to-night."

"I'd like to ask him a few questions. Just to find out who put him up to this, I'd be willing to let him go."

"Fire away; but you'll find he either can't, or won't, talk English."

Sam's prediction proved correct—the would-be assassin simply shook his head, in response to the questions.

"I see you were right," remarked Draper, adding, as Sam linked arms with the Italian:

"I'd give a year's salary, to know his principal in this little affair."

"Probably don't know himself," returned the young detective, and explained:

"He is, without doubt, one of a band of hired assassins, and the only principal they ever know is their chief."

"Phew!" whistled Draper, and went into a brown study, until the station-house was reached, where he wakened up long enough to give a name and address, and make a complaint against his would-be assassin.

Sam followed his companion's example, and it was as well they did not give their real names and addresses as the sequel proved.

Nothing was found on the prisoner, except a stiletto, and a steel glove, to protect his hand while using that deadly weapon.

"Well, I owe it to you, that that beautiful specimen of Italian art, was not buried in my heart," observed Draper, as he and Sam walked toward Eighth avenue.

He had heard the young detective explain to the police sergeant, how he had accidentally noticed the suspicious actions of Pietro, and the prisoner, and thus came to be the means of preventing the intended murder.

When Sam's story was ended—and he made it very brief—the sergeant looked significantly at the prisoner's handcuffs, and asked:

"Any further use for those bracelets?"

"Perhaps."

As Sam uttered the monosyllable, he switched back his heavy coat, as if by accident, and the sergeant immediately ordered the handcuffs removed, and restored to the young detective, remarking in a professional way:

"May lead to some important revelations when the headquarters screws are applied, eh?"

"Yes," assented Sam, but his tone said plain enough:

"Don't talk any more."

The sergeant, (who imagined the young detective to be some important Headquarters man,) understood him, and bade both a cordial "good-night."

But Draper was as sharp as a steel-trap, and the significant words, and actions, had not escaped him.

After his remark that he owed his life to Sam, he remained silent until they arrived at Eighth avenue. Then he asked:

"Which way are you going?"

"Down," hazarded Sam.

"Good enough! This business has spoiled my plans for to-night."

"Mine, too."

They were standing on the corner, under the light of a street lamp, waiting for a car.

Each could see the face of the other quite plainly, and, by the expression of Draper's countenance, Sam guessed the former was going to ask a delicate question.

Nor was he mistaken. After a few seconds' hesitation the workingman said:

"I hope you will not be offended, Mr. Green, (Sam's station-house name) but, I am going to ask you a plain, blunt question, whether or not:

"Were you in the same car with me by accident?"

"I assure you," he added, "I've good reason—especially after what you have seen to-night, for asking."

Sam had, (as the result of what he had learned, and of studying Draper, while in the car), already decided that the "workingman" was the superior of the millionaire, and this good opinion was further increased by saving his life.

This is always the case. The man whom you begin by helping, with a feeling of indifference, or even of suspicion, you soon grow to like. The reverse is equally true.

Somewhat Sam, now felt that he could trust Draper—at least, to the extent of being honest with him, and he unhesitatingly replied:

"No, my being in that car was not an accident, Mr. Robinson."

"As you probably know, my name is Draper," was the suggestive rejoinder.

Sam hesitated a moment, and said:

"Well, hang it all! Mine is Sam Sharp."

"Thank you for your confidence," quietly returned Draper, adding:

"Here is our car coming. We will say nothing more about it at present, but when we get down further—say at 59th street, we will, if you please, go to some quiet place where we can have a bite, and a chat."

"To a certain extent, you have the advantage of me—knowing, partly, who and what I am, while I—though pretty sure you are a detective, can only suspect who your employer is."

The last word was uttered as the car reached the corner, and boarding it they rode in silence

to 59th street, where they alighted and entered a hotel.

Securing a private room, and ordering a substantial meal, to which both were well prepared to do justice, these strangely united friends repaired to the apartment assigned them.

While awaiting their food, nothing was said touching the subject of their recent conversation, but, as soon as it was disposed of, Draper lighted a cigar, and said, rather than asked:

"You are working on the Abbot matter, Mr. Sharp?"

"I am."

"So am I. Another question, and you shall hear my story—and ask almost anything you please."

"Who are you working for—in whose interest?"

Sam noted the exception, and answered:

"I cannot tell you."

"You mean you will not?"

"Not exactly that. I must know more, before undertaking to tell what I am not authorized to speak of to anybody."

"Well—perhaps you can answer this:

"Are you (directly, or indirectly) employed by or on account of, Mrs. Strange—or by any woman?"

"I am employed, partly on account of a woman, but positively not Mrs. Strange," replied Sam.

"How do you know she is not Mrs. Strange?" demanded the other, suspiciously.

"Because she is not Mrs. Anything, yet—she is a girl of nineteen or less, I should say."

"Well—yes, you have saved my life, and I will trust you, but it's a strange story."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "WORKINGMAN'S" STORY.

"My story," began Draper, puffing reflectively at his cigar, "has quite something to do with myself, but I'll condense that part of it as much as if I were editing 'copy' for *The Luminary*."

"As you know, William Draper, the millionaire, and myself, are supposed to be cousins."

"As a matter of fact, we are not, although a certain resemblance between us helps to strengthen this impression."

"My supposed cousin was adopted by my uncle, at the suggestion, and through the influence of Mr. Wright, the banker, in whom he had great confidence."

"A quarrel with my father, over some business matter, was the reason of his adopting anybody. It would, he thought, be a fine way of revenging himself for his defeat in their quarrel—but, enough of that, I was at school at the time the stranger was adopted."

"Except Mr. Wright, and, perhaps, my uncle, nobody knew anything about him."

"When my uncle died, it was found that a will, made just after the quarrel with my father, left everything to his adopted son."

"I have reason to believe there was another will, more recent, and quite different—but that has nothing to do with the matter."

"Several months ago—nearly a year—I met Miss Abbot at the house of a mutual friend, and we became great friends—more than that, I hope."

"By degrees, as I became more intimate with the family, and its affairs, I learned something of the penurious way Abbot treated them, and having plenty of free tickets to concerts, theaters, etc., I managed to give mother and daughter some little amusement—recreation which the father never would have consented to, had it cost him anything."

"At the time of Abbot's disappearance, I had become very intimate with the family, and was, of course, interested."

"Being assigned to write up the matter, I naturally started to inquire at the company's offices, but was referred to the president, and in him met almost a dead wall."

"Aside from the amount of the defalcation, he would say nothing—give no particulars, but I set this down to business reserve, at the time."

"Of course, I visited Police Headquarters, and through a detective who was on the case, learned of Mrs. Strange."

"Again, I visited Mr. Wright, and, again, was informed that there was nothing to be learned—that the police had not found any trace of the man, or the money."

"This made me suspicious, because I knew it was untrue, and, when I learned from King—the detective—that he had received a hint to drop Mrs. Strange, I became very much interested in that expensive, and mysterious, lady."

"Starting out to trace, and locate, her, begin-

ning where King had left off—and, I forgot to mention that, he was quickly ordered to drop Mrs. Strange—I finally discovered her."

"She is, or was until yesterday, living in a handsome house, near the river, in the street where I was attacked."

"Ascribing the non-communicative policy of the company to its president, I rehearsed all that had been written about Abbot, and, at a venture, added that Mr. Wright and Mrs. Strange were related,—for I felt pretty sure it was he who was protecting the woman from police investigation."

"No denial of this assertion came from him, and representing myself as coming from another paper, I called at the 9—street house to interview her, and obtain a contradiction, so I put it there, from her."

"A shrewd looking woman, who came to the door, quietly informed me that Mrs. Strange was ill, but that if I would call again next day, (yesterday,) some information might, possibly, be furnished me."

"Yesterday, an hour earlier than the previous day, I came through 9—street, intending to call for the half-promised information, but when near the house saw a man, whom I am certain was Wright, standing in the doorway."

"He was evidently watching for me, and retreated into the house as I drew nearer."

"It didn't require much thinking to decide, that the invitation to make a second call, was given, merely to gain time to prepare a trap of some kind—not that I dreamt of anything like to-night's occurrence."

"Instead, therefore, of entering the trap, I turned back, and walked as fast I could to Eighth avenue, where, stopping and looking back, and finding I was not followed, came to the conclusion that I had got away without being recognized."

"To-night's attack proves I was mistaken, and, also, that Wright is a desperate man, and will stop at nothing to prevent the probing of the Abbot mystery—for there is a mystery, and the solution of it lies close to Mrs. Strange's house, and self."

"Then, you've changed your ideas about the Brookvale cottage?" said Sam, tentatively.

"Eh? What do you know of that, and how do you know it?"

Draper's intense surprise caused Sam to smile, as he answered:

"I'll tell you,—in fact, be equally frank with you, but should first like to know, if you carried out your intention of entering the cottage, and searching for the papers, or securities, you thought were hidden there."

"Miss Abbot could not—would not—have repeated—" began Draper, in wondering doubt.

"She did not," interrupted Sam, adding:

"Please tell me if you went there that night, and I'll relieve your mind as to how I learned it."

"No, I did not. Our city editor met me in the depot. He was being taken home, very ill, and begged me to return, and see that things were run according to his ideas."

"Very good! Now I'll explain," and Sam told how Lightning Lew had come to overhear Draper's words.

Then, feeling that there was not only nothing to fear, but much to gain, by doing so, the young detective went, or rather went back to the beginning, and detailed the whole story, as told by Lightning Lew.

Sam went no further, for the moment, pausing the note the effect of his story on Draper.

The latter appeared to be most astonished at the supposed cousin's part in the affair, and the fact that there was a second watcher.

"I know," he said, slowly and thoughtfully, "that Will pitied Lucy—Miss Abbot, I mean—and it is more than likely that the story he told Pryce, was invented to cover his paying more money to prosecute the search for Abbot."

"Possibly," commented Sam, thinking of the millionaire's queer conduct, while the speaker was with the Abbots.

"But who could the other watcher be?" continued Draper. "I can understand Wright's being there, for I'm inclined to think—in fact, sure, that he's as deep in the mire, as Abbot is in the mud, if not more, but I can't imagine who the other could be."

"It was natural enough for Pryce to mistake me for Will, for I've often taken his place—doing things he never had an opportunity of knowing how to do without being detected, but, as I've told you, I did not go to Brookvale that night."

"Have you changed your mind regarding the possibility of valuable papers being, having been, concealed there?" asked Sam, who was considering whether it would be well to reveal to his

companion, what he had seen opposite the Abbot residence.

The question was asked more to give himself time to decide what to do, than anything else, but Draper's reply aroused him.

"By no means," replied the "workingman." "Indeed, what you have told me, makes me sure that Abbot, himself, now has those papers."

"He, (Abbot,) has been concealed there all the time, while he has been looked for everywhere else."

"I don't pretend to account for his horrible appearance, but I can account for his, apparently mysterious, and ghost-like, comings and goings."

"The cottage, as it now is, appears to be a frame structure, but, in reality, the framework is merely a shell, covering an old stone house, built nearly one hundred years ago, and full of secret doors and passages."

"How do you happen to know this valuable information?" asked Sam, much interested, and delighted at being able to explain the mystery to Pryce.

"Oh, I wrote up that section years ago—just before Abbot bought the old stone house and put the frame over it."

"Good, good!" exclaimed the young detective. "I must go there to-morrow night, and let Lightning Lew into the secret."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FIENDISH PLAN.

LIGHTNING LEW had a dim consciousness of the meaning of Abbot's words, as the latter, after slaughtering the Butcher, danced back to the parlor swinging his murderous iron bar, and laughing fiendishly over his deadly work.

"Now for the other!" were the words.

"That must mean me," thought the detective, and opening his eyes, saw Abbot dancing toward him.

"Danger which cows some men, spurs others."

Lightning Lew was one of the "others" class, and just as Abbot was about to strike, he sat up, fairly roaring:

"Stand back!"

Involuntarily, Abbot obeyed the terrific-toned order, and in an instant the detective was on his feet, and, with a leveled revolver, continued:

"Drop that bar!"

Down went the bar, and deceived by this apparent submission, the detective approached with a pair of handcuffs, intending to make Abbot prisoner until he had obtained some explanation of the latter's conduct, of Wright's terror, and of his (Wright's) share in the robbery of the company; also possession of the securities which he was certain were hidden in the house.

Hanging the revolver by the trigger-guard on his thumb, Pryce extended the other hand, at the same time ordering:

"Hold up your hands!"

Abbot obeyed by throwing out both fists, striking the detective full in the face, and hurling his body with the blow, which was powerful enough to cause the recipient to stagger.

Before he could recover himself, Abbot sprang upon him like a tiger, uttering a snarling cry, not unlike that beast when enraged, and the next moment Lightning Lew was on the floor, fast choking to death!

Although he had unconsciously retained his grip on the revolver, it was useless—the terrible clutch deprived him of all his great strength, and in a very short time he was unconscious, a few seconds more of that life-destroying pressure on his windpipe, and he would be dead!

But Abbot had no intention of killing him—yet, and when he saw the detective's eyes close, and felt the muscles relax, picked up the handcuffs, and placed them on the wrists of the owner.

When the detective recovered consciousness, his first feeling was one of intense chagrin at being outwitted, followed by surprise at the great strength of the old cashier.

He had not opened his eyes, nor made any other sign of life, on recovering consciousness, but feeling, rather than hearing, his captor moving about, Pryce raised his eyelids a trifle to see what was going on.

Abbot was on his hands and knees, pouring a tiny stream of black powder, from out of a small package, which the detective instantly recognized.

It was the giant powder!

Crawling slowly across the floor, Abbot continued laying the train from the doorway to the prisoner, chuckling gleefully all the while.

Lightning Lew's eyes were now wide open—literally and metaphorically—and when Abbot, turning suddenly, looked at him, he saw his prisoner was conscious.

This fact appeared to both please and amuse him greatly.

"He, he, he!" he giggled, "what a grand crash it will be! Ho, ho! Both together we go to hell!"

Then stopping and regarding Pryce attentively, as if to make sure that the latter fully understood him, he continued:

"But I'm going *whole*—you'll go in *scraps*!"

"Good God! He's mad!"

The detective's agonized exclamation described Abbot's mental condition exactly; the ex-cashier was a madman!

Knowing how liable insane persons are to change, Pryce remained silent, hoping against hope, that something would occur to cause the madman to alter his fiendish plan.

Nothing occurred, however, and soon the train was laid to the detective's side.

"Now, the can, and the cartridge!" muttered Abbot, and, leaving Pryce, went into the rear parlor.

Why not roll over a couple times, at least, and thus get away from the end of the train? Then, when Abbot applied the match, and ran away, there would be a flash—and that would be all.

Quick as the idea occurred to him, the prisoner endeavored to act on it, but, alas! he was dealing with a madman, and with insane cunning Abbot, in addition to binding his feet, had driven long spikes into the floor on either side of him!

He was powerless; could move neither hand, nor foot, nor body, and could only await the final moment. A few minutes more, and then the earthly career of the once famous Lightning Lew would be ended!

"If they had hanged me under the first sentence at Libby [Prison], or shot me under the second 'sentence,' he grumbled, "some one would have carried the news, and I would have been remembered—perhaps have got some credit—in the North."

"But, to die here like a dog, at the hands of a madman—Bah!"

Had the veteran detective's situation been less terrible his disgust would have been laughable—for *disgust* was actually the feeling he now had regarding his approaching death.

Abbot's return at this point changed the current of his thoughts, and he looked on curiously while the madman poured the remainder of the powder into a small tin-can—such as is used for holding baking-powder.

Having nearly filled the can with the deadly giant powder, the madman next placed in it the still more deadly dynamite cartridge—in the center of the powder—and then put on the cover.

"All very good, my boy, but how are you going to touch her off?"

An old soldier, Pryce could not forbear smiling at the apparent simplicity of the madman, but it was only apparent, for after putting on the cover, Abbot rolled a long fuse, inserted it in a hole previously drilled in the top of the can, placed the whole on the prisoner's chest and bent the fuse over until the free end rested on the floor.

After pausing a moment to contemplate his terrible preparations, Abbot next cut off about a half inch of the candle, lighted it, sprinkled a pinch of powder, (which he had reserved for the purpose,) along Pryce's clothing to the end of the train.

"There!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "If the fuse fails to burn, that will make it," and taking the piece of candle, placed it on the other end of the fatal train.

"It will be grand! Magnificent!" he continued, and placing a chair across the hapless prisoner's legs, sat down to watch the approaching terrible explosion!

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE STORY.

LIGHTNING LEW, with less than inch of rapidly wasting candle between him and a horrible death, retained his self-possession, and his brain was busy recalling the stories he had heard, and read, of the expedients successfully resorted to by persons in dangerous situations with madmen.

In every instance, success appeared to have hinged upon suggesting another plan of carrying out the same idea, but Pryce racked his brain in vain for another method of exploding the deadly can—without danger to himself.

Abandoning that idea, entirely, he said:

"See here, Abbot! You have a revolver, and so have I. Now, instead of blowing us both to kingdom come in one moment, why not stand, one in each corner, and blaze away at each

other? Then, we'll have *some fun* before dying(!)."

The madman seemed to be struck by the idea, and, for a moment, the prisoner breathed hopefully.

"No, he might come. It must be as it is," decided Abbot, after a few moments' thought.

"Who might come?" demanded Pryce, adding:

"If you mean Wright—why all the better if he does. We can shoot him first—or blow him up, and shoot each other!"

"No, you do not know him, or you would not say that."

"He is terrible! I would have killed him—oh, so long ago that I can't remember—if I dared!"

"He ruined me! For him—at his bidding—I stole—I forged—all to keep him quiet."

"Ah, how I should like to kill him—twist my fingers round his fat windpipe!"

Calm a moment before, the madman now looked a perfect demon. His teeth grated, and his fingers worked convulsively, as he spoke of strangling Wright.

In a few moments, this sudden access of rage passed away, and forgetful of his danger, the detective listened, with rapt attention, when, in a mournful tone, Abbot began again:

"Yet, he was not always so. When I married his sister, in old England, long, long ago, he was an honest, free, happy fellow, careless, and liberal with his own money—as he has been of late years with that of others."

"I was always careful, but somehow I didn't get along there, so, leaving my wife and child behind me, I came to America."

The madman paused in his story, and Pryce glanced anxiously at the candle. It was growing frightfully short, and he feared the explosion would come, before the story was finished.

Strange as it may seem, he was eager to hear the mystery of Abbot's conduct cleared up, although having no hope of ever repeating it.

"Bad luck followed me across the Atlantic," Abbot began again, after a little while, "and when I lost all, I wrote and told him, asking whether I should go home."

"After some time he wrote, and sent some money, telling me to remain—that he was coming—and—oh! the cruel lie! he told me my wife was dead."

"Then, I did not want to go back, as I did before, and, then, some time after—I don't remember—he came, bringing my little girl—my poor Lucy."

"He had some money—only a little—but he was lucky, and soon had more, and then he married. Before he was married, he told me she was rich, and had grand connections, but, for once, he was deceived."

"His wife had the grand connections, but very little money, and supposing him to be wealthy, married him."

"He was lucky, you see, and had the reputation of being rich."

"Some time after he came to me—I was working in a bank, and having enough to keep little Lucy and myself nicely, was becoming contented and happy—but he came and stirred up the demon."

"We will form a banking and trading company," he said, but I had no money, nor had he, so I did not see how it could be done."

"Bah, you're a fool!" he said. "You have a reputation for strict honesty. Three times you have failed, and each time paid pound for pound, dollar for dollar."

"It was true—that was why I was then assistant cashier in a bank. Still, I did not understand him."

"He laughed at my simplicity, and explained his plan."

"My reputation for honesty, and his for shrewd financiering—it was luck, all luck—were to be our capital."

"Let others furnish the money—there are plenty who will jump at the chance," he said, "and my wife's friends will help us!"

"I did not like the idea, but he urged, and—as I always did—I yielded."

"Then, one day, he invited me to his house, and I met there the lady whom I afterward married and lived with, in torture, here."

"She was rich, I was not then displeasing, and he urged me to marry her—and, again, I yielded."

"After that came a terrible day, when I was to be called on to produce some securities, and they were gone."

"I went to him and told him. He laughed at me and said: 'Confess you've been speculating and lost, and I'll help you,' but I could not, and he told me to look out for myself—he would not help me."

"I begged and entreated his aid—he was so shrewd—and finally—curse the hour!—he consented, and asked what securities they were. I told him—they were certificates of our own company, upon which we had loaned to a stockholder—and he bade me bring some blanks.

"I brought the blanks, filled out duplicates of the missing certificates at his dictation—and then he told me to sign his name and the secretary's—commit forgery!

"I refused. He became angry—and he is terrible when angry—and bade me leave his room.

"You are wasting my time," he said, and warned me to be ready to produce the certificates, or equivalent, next morning.

"What was I to do? I had not one thousand dollar—much less thirty five-thousand—and I hesitated—and was lost.

"After that day, everything he wished done, I was compelled to do. He took up the certificates—and I forged, and robbed, to supply the money to do it with.

"He held them over me, but offered to give them up for double their value—and I became a miser. Every penny was watched, and often—oh, a long time, I was nearly able to purchase liberty, but, ah! I did not, yet, know him.

"When I told him how near I was, he looked surprised, but said nothing, though I had accomplished a wonderful task.

"Two weeks after in the afternoon, as he was leaving, he bade me come with him, and I obeyed my master.

"He looked very grave, and I was full of apprehension of some fresh misfortune, but he said nothing until we left the car which had taken us far, far, up-town.

"Then, he said: 'John, I've had some strange news, since last night—and it concerns you.'

"I shook with fear—of what I knew not, and observing it, he continued:

"Yes, it is terrible news. Instead of being dead as I was informed—I was in France, at the time—and as I informed you, my sister, your wife, did not die in Italy, and is now in New York—at the foot of this street."

"I thought I should die—I gasped for breath, but he brought me to my senses.

"Come, come! No nonsense!" he said roughly. "Do you wish to see her, or will you provide for her without seeing her?"

"I saw his game—I must remain in his power still longer, with two houses to support—and braving him, for once, said I would see her, for I feared, or rather hoped, it was a trick.

"Very well," he said, "but I warn you, it will not be pleasant. Your conduct, as she sees it, has driven her almost crazy."

"I made no answer, and we went into a fine house near the river—and I saw my first wife!

"As he said, she was almost, if not quite, crazy, and after one look at her staring yet unseeing eyes, I fled into the street."

Lower and lower the candle was burning, during the recital of this strange story, but so interested was the listener that he did not think of his terrible danger, until now (when Abbot paused, shaking with emotion), and, to his horror, Pryce saw that it had dwindled down to the thickness of a nickel!

"A minute or two, and all will be over," he shuddered.

"Then I became a slave in real earnest," resumed Abbot, but Pryce's attention was now riveted on the what remained of the candle.

He kept his gaze fastened on it, every moment expecting to see the fatal, warning flash.

Soon, oh, so soon, the wick would topple over, and then—

It was just going, so it appeared to Pryce. Then came a flash, a loud explosion, quickly followed by another—and the detective's overwrought nerves succumbed to the terrible strain, just as the window was thrown up, and Sam Sharp dashed into the room, followed by Draper.

The first shot had snuffed the end of the candle on the powder; the second had knocked the other candle off the table, and the room was in darkness.

CHAPTER XX.

THE "WORKINGMAN'S" STORY.

THE young men were prepared for the (hoped-for) result of their shots, and two dark lanterns flashed over the unconscious forms of Pryce and Abbot.

"Don't show that you've noticed it," cautioned Sam, after making sure that Pryce had only fainted, and turning to Abbot, continued:

"Jupiter! this fellow's badly hurt."

With the first shot the madman had sprung

up, and the next shot left him in darkness, just as he attempted to jump to the door.

This caused him to trip over the prostrate form of the detective, and he fell, striking his head against the corner of the table, receiving an ugly-looking wound on the forehead, from which blood flowed in torrents.

Whipping out his handkerchief, Sam bound up the wound, and turning to Draper, ordered:

"Find a lamp, or a candle, if possible!

"This man is seriously injured."

Lantern in hand, Draper started off, and, taking advantage of his absence, Sam dashed nearly half a pocket-flask of liquor in Pryce's face.

The effect was almost instantaneous, but when the detective sat up—his bonds had been removed,—Sam was bending over Abbot.

Draper returned with a lighted hand lamp, at nearly the same moment, and Pryce stared from one to the other of his rescuers.

As the light appeared on the scene, the young detective turned his head, and innocently (?) remarked:

"I'm afraid we interrupted an interesting story, Mr. Pryce."

But, Lightning Lew wouldn't have it.

"No, my boy," he said, "you came just in time to interrupt my departure for another world—in fragments! How came you so opportunely?"

"That's a long story," answered Sam, adding: "Perhaps it would be as well to let it go until we see what can be done for this man. He's hard hit."

"Shot?" questioned Pryce, springing to his feet.

"No; struck against the table."

"Get a couple of those pillow slips! you'll find them on the next floor," ordered Detective Pryce, after examining the wound, and, as Sam was supporting Abbot's head on his knee, Draper hastened away.

The latter had been so close to Lightning Lew, that the keen-eyed detective had been able to see that Draper's mustache was not false, and therefore, that he was not Draper—at all events, his Draper.

"Who is he and where did you find him, Sam?" came the puzzled question, when the "workingman" had left the room.

"His name is Draper, and he's your would-be burglar, but it's too long to start to tell you, yet, how and where I found him.

"As soon as Abbot's fixed up, I'll tell you, all that's happened—and it will be interesting, I can assure you."

Draper now returned with a couple of pillow-slips, which Pryce quickly transformed into bandages, and having bound up the madman's head in a very workman-like style, had him placed on a sofa.

"I'm afraid the skull is fractured, and we must get a doctor as early as possible in the morning," he said, and after seeing that the injured man was in an easy position, continued:

"And, now, for your story, Sam!"

Just then, the little man in the big coat came softly into the hallway, barely avoiding stumbling over the Butcher's body, and heard the young detective's reply:

"Well, to set your mind at ease at once, I guess we've got Mr. Wright for inciting murder, if nothing more. He paid to have Mr. Draper, here, put out of the way, and we have the man he paid the money to."

It was quite cold, and at this point Sam arose and shut the parlor door, saying:

"Since you have Mr. Abbot on friendly terms, we may as well keep warm."

He spoke jestingly, but Mr. Juniper took it in dead earnest, and, now that the parlor door was closed, lighted a match to see what he had stumbled against.

He started back in horrified surprise, on beholding the corpse of the Butcher, and stole out of the house, muttering:

"Good heavens! What may not the Butcher have told them?"

Sam, meantime, was relating what had taken place, since he started on the Draper end of the matter—the beginning of which was as new to the "workingman," as to the elder detective.

The former, however, seemed more amused than anything else on learning of his supposed cousin's mysterious actions, and in answer to Pryce's inquiring glance, remarked:

"Ob, that's Will to a dot! He's nothing, if not mysterious."

Pryce was not so sure of this, but said nothing, and taking up the story on the morning following the attempted assassination, Sam continued:

"The fellow was remanded to the Tombs, where we followed him with an interpreter; but it was useless—he absolutely refused to say anything.

"Shortly after we left him—Mr. Draper to call on Mrs. Strange, and yours truly to hunt up Vanucci—a basket of food was sent in to the prisoner—by whom, nobody has yet been able to find out positively, but I think I know the gentleman. An hour after the food arrived, the prisoner was dead—poisoned!"

"Well, I found Vanucci, (who had no idea that he had been recognized,) and got him where I could hold him, if he showed his teeth. Then I told my little tale, and showed how close he was to Sing Sing—if he failed to see things my way.

"He wanted to show fight—bad, but I stopped that by pointing out that, even if he were able to finish me—which I took the liberty of doubting—there were still two police officers outside the door, or a four-story jump to be overcome, before he could call himself safe—for a couple of hours.

"Then Pietro came off his perch, and began to talk business.

"If I would promise that he should escape punishment, he would tell who was his principal, and I promised.

"With one of the officers as a witness, he signed a statement declaring that Mr. Wright had paid one thousand dollars to have Mr. Draper put out of the way.

"That ends my story," added Sam, "and now Mr. Draper will tell you his—the Strange story."

"On reaching Mrs. Strange's residence," began the "workingman," taking up the thread where his savior dropped it, "I found that lady really ill. Originally, it was not intended that I should see her at all, but Wright's accident had frightened the shrewd-looking woman, (who was his confederate), and I imagine my stern appearance—assumed for the occasion—frightened her still more. At any rate, I was admitted, and, in substance, this is what I learned:

"Mrs. Strange was—for she died before I left her—the first wife of that unfortunate man—Abbot.

"He left her to better his fortunes in this country, but failed, and on learning this, her brother, Mr. Wright, to whom fortune had, also, been unkind, conceived the idea of making her a widow, and marrying her to a wealthy man, who had been Abbot's rival for her hand.

"He accomplished his purpose, by first informing his sister of her husband's death, and, a little later, on seeing that his hopes were about to be realized, by informing Abbot that Mrs. Abbot was dead.

"To make sure of keeping Abbot quiet, he found some pretext for visiting America, and as Lucy was rather delicate, offered to take her with him—the ocean voyage, he declared, would greatly benefit her.

"But he had failed to take into consideration a mother's love—all villains make some mistake, that finally ruins them—and finding he did not return, Mrs. Abbot, (as she, still, really was), instituted inquiries, and learned that her husband and child were together in New York.

"The shock turned her brain, and the husband blew his out—instead of Wright's.

"The latter brought her here, with a child born during the second marriage—the half-brother of Lucy Abbot, and the present William Draper, millionaire!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGE RECOVERY.

"WILLIAM DRAPER—the millionaire—the half-brother of Lucy Abbot?" slowly and incredulously questioned Pryce.

The "workingman" smiled at the detective's astonishment.

"That is what his unfortunate mother told me," he replied, adding:

"With the approach of death, her mind seems to have cleared, and the vague, shadowy ideas of wrong-doing on Wright's part, became awful certainties, but she devoted her last moments to undoing, as far as possible, the wrongs committed by her brother by telling me all she knew."

"But, if she was insane, how did she know who adopted her son?" demanded Pryce.

"In this way. Wright had a great deal of influence over my uncle, and when the latter quarreled with my father, he consulted the former about adopting a son who would displace me as his heir.

"Always scheming and looking ahead to feather his own nest, the philanthropic banker immediately approved of the idea, at the same time offering to find a fit subject for my uncle's

benevolent designs, and this being gladly agreed to, a few days afterward, presented his nephew, as the son of an old friend, whose mother was insane and his father dead.

"Uncle John was pleased with the child's appearance, but, notwithstanding Wright's influence, insisted on seeing the insane mother, and in going through all the forms necessary to make the adoption strictly legal and binding."

"And how did all this come to light—and when?" asked the veteran detective, adding:

"I have known the family for years, and never heard a breath of this. Your uncle told me that his son was adopted from an asylum."

"Which was quite true, but that was one of Mr. Wright's ideas—to save Will the pain of knowing that his mother was insane, he said, when suggesting the idea to my uncle, but really to baffle all inquiries, should any attempt be made to trace the child."

"He knew my uncle had made him executor of his will, and no doubt had formed some scheme to obtain control of the estate, but Will was of age when Uncle John died, and, although Wright was executor, he had little time and no opportunity to rob him."

"All very straight and satisfactory—as far as it goes," commented the still doubtful detective, "but I should like to know who discovered all this, and what proof there is of it."

"Well, to begin backward," smilingly answered "workingman" Draper, "the papers of adoption, which stated his name to be William Strange, were found in my uncle's desk by Will himself, and the name Strange mentioned in connection with the disappearance of Abbot—cashier of Wright's company—made him suspicious. Then he engaged you to hunt up the cashier, while detective King and your humble servant started to look up Mrs. Strange—with what results you know."

"Yes, I know—I know that this is the damndest mixed-up case I've ever struck!" exclaimed Pryce, and turning to Sam, in a comically-perplexed, irritated way, asked:

"Anything else?"

"Just a little," laughed Sam.

"After seeing Vanucci safe in jail, I met Mr. Draper, and we arranged to come up here tonight, as our discoveries seemed important."

"Seeing a light shining through the windows, we deemed it wise to try and get a glimpse of who was inside and what was going on before showing ourselves—and did so."

"Lucky thing you did!" commented Pryce, as Sam paused. "What did ye think of it?"

"Well, at first, we didn't know what to think of it, but, fortunately, the carpet is light-colored, and, after a little while—seeing the small piece of candle at the end of what looked like a thick black thread leading up to you, and you lying on the floor—we got an idea of what it meant."

"Luckily both are pretty good shots—and you know the rest, but it was Abbot's conduct that puzzled us."

"Oh, he's crazy," explained Pryce, and this called attention to the fact that the fugitive cashier was now conscious—and not only that, but the light of reason shone in his eyes!

The shock occasioned by striking his head against the corner of the table, had, perhaps, restored Abbot's reason—just as another shock had upset it—and he had heard a great deal of what passed between the trio, who now turned to look at him.

As Sam turned toward Abbot, he caught sight of some papers lying on the floor, near the fallen Bible, and springing to his feet, went over and picked them up.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, looking at one, "a certificate of The Great American Banking and Trading—"

With a cry of delight that startled the others, Abbot sprang up, and snatching the certificate, glanced at it.

"Yes, yes!" he cried. "Thank God! They are the missing certificates! Now! Now, I can defy the scoundrel!"

He was overcome with emotion, being weak from loss of blood, and seeming to be about to faint, Sam sprang forward and supported him to the sofa.

"Here, take some of this," said Draper, and having swallowed some of the proffered liquor, Abbot recovered sufficiently to tell his story, which, up to the point where he was interrupted, was substantially the same as that told Pryce.

The balance was as follows:

During his (Abbot's) last day at the office, Wright had made his largest demand on the cashier—a robbery of one hundred thousand dol-

lars, in securities which could easily be converted into cash.

As usual, but with more vehemence, Abbot at first refused, and then yielded.

Wright was going out of town that afternoon, but would be near his Brookvale house, and bade the unfortunate cashier bring the securities there—fixing Sunday evening for the meeting.

When they met, Abbot warned his master that these robberies were growing too enormous; that they would certainly be discovered, and that he would no longer be the cat's-paw—even if he shared the benefit.

This led to a quarrel—the president threatening, and the miserable cashier defying him to do his worst, as he should have done in the beginning.

At length the excitement grew too great for Abbot's already over-wrought nerves, and he fell—apparently dead.

They were out in the grounds surrounding the Brookvale mansion, and very much alarmed at what had happened, Wright dragged the body into an out-house.

When Abbot recovered consciousness, or what he did afterward, was a mystery to himself, but he smiled faintly when Pryce related how he had shot at him.

"It was the work of my magic lantern, undoubtedly," he explained. "The house is very old, as you probably know, and full of secret passages, one of which opens just opposite the parlor door."

"But it was an exact picture of yourself!" objected the detective.

"Well, I cannot account for having painted it, but in my early days my ambition was to become an artist, and I was considered a pretty fair one when I turned my attention to business."

"And Wright—what do you suppose he was searching for?"

"Probably, for what he knew I had saved, but I don't understand—"

"What's this?" interrupted Sam, who had been looking over the old Bible.

"This" proved to be one of a number of Government bonds—the very ones which Wright had so nearly secured, and which Abbot had hidden in the same place where he secreted the missing certificates—a pocket inside of the cover of the Bible, but on the opposite cover to the first.

"Good heavens! Can it be possible?" cried Abbot, springing up, but, before reaching Sam, tottered, and would have fallen but for Draper, who caught and carried him back to the sofa.

The joyful surprise caused by this second unexpected discovery had proved too great, and this time the more sinned against than sinning man fainted.

"I hope this won't overturn his brain again, but I fear it will," said the veteran detective, as they waited for Abbot's return to consciousness, but his foreboding was only too well founded.

When the cashier opened his eyes he was delirious.

"This must be attended to at once!" declared Pryce. "Sam and I will return to the city, while you can stay and watch him. We will send you a doctor from Brookvale, and a nurse from New York—Miss Abbot."

CHAPTER XXII.

A TRIP TO SPAIN—SUGGESTED TO WRIGHT.

AFTER leaving Draper, the veteran and his young assistant hurried to Brookvale, where they caught and found a physician, and, by paying a stiff fee, persuaded him to proceed without delay to the Abbot cottage.

Having started the doctor, they consulted as to what was best to do: remain in Brookvale until the "accommodation" left there in the morning, or go on to the station above, and catch an Express?

Experience had rendered the veteran detective one of your "delays are dangerous" men, and he decided in favor of the latter course—Sam assenting, although he would have much preferred remaining in Brookvale to walking to P—, from which point they started exactly four hours after Mr. Juniper.

The little man, however, made no stops—not even when passing his favorite haunts in the city—while the man-hunters, after leaving the Grand Central Depot, put away a very early breakfast in a very leisurely manner, feeling fully assured that their "game" was, and would be, safe ahead—and he was.

Mr. Juniper, meantime, had reached the residence of the senior member of the famous firm by whom he was employed, where, after a violent ringing of the door-bell, he was admitted.

Without waiting for permission, the little man dashed up the stairs to his employer's bedroom,

and rapped loudly on the door, until Mr. Rowe made his appearance looking very angry at being disturbed.

"What in the name of—" he began, but on perceiving who his visitor was, stopped short, and quickly demanded:

"What's wrong, Juniper?"

"It's all wrong with Wright, sir!"

"Come in, come in!" exclaimed Mr. Rowe, and regardless of the fact that Mrs. Rowe—very much awake—was lying in the bed, Juniper entered, and related what he had seen, surmised, and heard, at the Abbot cottage.

For a few minutes after his clerk had finished, Mr. Rowe paced the floor in troubled silence.

Then after muttering: "The man's a fool! An ass! We must not be known in such an affair!" turned to Juniper.

"Get Mr. Rummel here as quick as possible!" he ordered.

"Don't stand on ceremony—pull out the bell-handle, and then kick down the door, if necessary!" he added, as Juniper picked up his hat and started off.

Fully impressed with the urgency of Mr. Rummel's speedy appearance at the senior partner's house, Mr. Juniper did not stand on ceremony, and within a half-hour the two partners, and their confidential clerk, were in consultation.

The conversation lasted until nearly midnight, when, having determined on their course of action, the senior partner said:

"Very well, Mr. Rummel, you had better go to him at once, and say that, in view of what he has done, we must decline to have any further dealings with him."

"Put it pretty sharp, (for he has overstepped the mark,) and, then, if at all able to move, advise to get out of the way at once."

"There is an early steamer for Spain this morning, I think, and though she only carries freight as a rule, money will procure a passage by her. Just hint that—and that extradition from Spain is more than doubtful."

Mr. Rummel, who was called the "pocket edition"—and who was really the brains—of the firm, nodded significantly, and departed.

The two lawyers and Mr. Wright lived close together, and within a few minutes Mr. Rummel was at the banker's residence, where he aroused and alarmed the whole household by his early appearance, for Mr. Wright was known far and wide as a kind-hearted, indulgent employer, and his servants slept late.

"Blawst 'is himpudence!" muttered Jeems, as Mr. Rummel brushed by him. "Hits ha houtrage to disturb ha gentleman"—he meant himself—"hat such han hour."

Paying no attention to Jeems's mutterings, and asking nobody's permission, the little lawyer—as famous in his way as his big partner—went straight to Mr. Wright's room.

"You can leave us for a few minutes," he said to the nurse, after bidding his client "good-morning," adding, as the attendant seemed in a hurry to get away:

"Remain within call—I will ring when you are wanted."

"What does this mean?" asked Wright, who had been listening in astonishment.

"Excuse me for one moment—how do you feel?"

"Never mind—answer my question!" sharply returned Mr. Wright.

"Very well, sir; it's your affair, not ours, and my visit means that the jig's up. They've found Abbot, and he has confessed everything that he knew. Then, they found Mrs. Strange—sane, mind you! and she told everything she knew, as did your confederate, her nurse, or rather keeper."

"Well?"

In his experience—long and varied as it was—as a criminal lawyer, Mr. Rummel had met many cool men, but never one, who standing in the position of the man who uttered this monosyllabic question, looked so entirely unconcerned in private, and he looked his admiration of the banker's nerve, as he piled on the agony by saying:

"Well, they've got Vanucci, and he, too, gave the name of his employer."

"Anything else?" calmly inquired Wright.

"Are you able to get around?"

"Why?"

"Well, there are some early steamers this morning—one, a freighter for Spain."

"Extradition is almost out of the question from Spain," significantly added Rummel.

"As bad as that?" asked Wright, in a strangely calm tone, while a peculiar smile played for a moment about his mouth.

"Well, yes; it looks as if a trip to Europe

would benefit your health—greatly. In fact, Mr. Wright, to come down to plain facts, it's Europe or Sing Sing!"

"Ab, indeed!"

The banker remained silent for several minutes, and when he spoke again, only said:

"Well, good-by, Rummel!"

"Then, you are going?"

"Oh, yes—I am most certainly going."

Rummel was a good-natured, big-hearted little fellow, and he did not like the way the banker, (half sitting, half lying, in the bed, propped up by pillows,) answered his question. There was a deadly meaning in the tone, if not the words, and as he reached the door, the lawyer turned with a half frightened look, and almost pleaded:

"Don't do it! I wouldn't do it, Mr. Wright!"

The man in the bed laughed bitterly.

"I can't stand without assistance for one minute," he said, "and you tell me it's Sing Sing, or Spain. Your early visit proves the urgency of the case, and I thank you—but, I am unable to move—or stand the agony of being carried downstairs, much less of going to Europe."

"Good-by, Rummel."

"Good-by," returned the lawyer, after a little hesitation, and without looking at his client passed out of the room.

Going down stairs, the lawyer met the nurse.

"Look here, my good fellow!" said he, "your master is inclined to be a little flighty, and if he asks for anything dangerous—knives, razors, pistols, poisons, or anything of that sort, refuse to obey him—d'ye understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good! I am his lawyer, and shall hold you responsible if he injures himself. Should he discharge you for having obeyed me, go to Mrs. Wright and tell her what I've told you."

And satisfied that he had thwarted the design which his client appeared (to him) to threaten, the big-hearted little man hastened away to notify Wright's physician of his suspicions.

Alarmed by Rummel's warning, the nurse hurriedly returned to his master's room, where he found his employer looking much as usual, except for a grayish pallor that overspread his countenance.

"Johnson! Be kind enough to bring me that pad of note-paper, and a pencil—no pen and ink," directed Mr. Wright.

As this was not against Rummel's orders, the nurse obeyed, and the banker having scribbled a few lines, asked for an envelope, which being furnished, he said:

"I shall want some wax to seal this envelope. There is a stick on the library table—please bring it here."

"And, Johnson"—as the nurse was about to go—"there is some money—a few dollars—in my trousers pocket, which you had better take when you—I guess you had better take it now."

"Flighty, eh? I wish everybody was as level-headed!" muttered Johnson, as he picked up the desired sealing-wax from the library table.

At that moment the sharp crack of a pistol rung through the house, and not a little alarmed Johnson ran back to his patient, but it was too late. Mr. Wright the banker, had outwitted both lawyer and nurse—and justice, too.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SAM MAKES A MESS OF IT.

WE must now return to Lightning Lew Pryce, and his youthful assistant, who after a hearty and leisurely eaten breakfast, proceeded downtown.

At Fourteenth street they separated, Pryce directing Sam to notify Mrs. Abbot and her daughter of the finding of the fugitive cashier, and under what circumstances.

"But no more, Sam," continued the veteran, "for although I think he'll suffer little or nothing, still he's our prisoner, and you must go back with them, to take turns with this Draper, in watching him until he's fit to be removed."

"All right, sir! Good-morning!"

"Hold on! I wouldn't trust too much to this Draper, he's in love with the daughter, you know, and there's no telling what he might do."

"Very good, sir! I'll keep an eye on all of them until you come," assured Sam, looking very grave, but as he turned away toward the humble residence of the Abbots, the young detective smiled and muttered:

"He's the most suspicious man I ever met. It's a wonder he trusts me."

It was still quite early when Sam knocked at Mrs. Abbot's door, and it was fortunate that it was, for Lucy was about starting to perform her first day's work for a stranger.

The young detective introduced himself merely as messenger from Mr. William Draper, "the

newspaper chap"—at which the young lady looked very indignant, but smiled when Sam went on to say that "the workingman" and he were great friends, and that it was because of their intimacy, he had been asked to escort Mrs. Abbot and her daughter to their former home in Brookvale.

"To Brookvale?" echoed Mrs. Abbot. "Why, what has happened—why should we go there?"

"Well, I don't know just how to explain it, madam, but it seems Mr. Draper found a lot of bonds, and certificates, that go a great way to prove that Mr. Abbot was a great deal more sinned against than sinning."

"Thank God!" fervently exclaimed Lucy, while the mother seemed about to faint, but quickly recovered herself, and at once prepared to accompany Sam and her daughter.

As they were about to start, Mrs. Abbot, who could not restrain her tears—joyful tears—exclaimed:

"Oh, if my poor, unfortunate husband could but know of this! If he could be found, I would be a happy woman!"

"Well, madam," said Sam, thinking this a good opportunity to prepare mother and daughter for what was awaiting them at the Brookvale cottage, "well, madam, I shouldn't be surprised if he knew all about it by this time."

"What do you mean, sir? How could Mr. Abbot know?" asked Mrs. Abbot, looking very much astonished, while Lucy eyed the young detective so suspiciously that he felt she partly guessed the truth.

He did not wish to plump out the whole truth at once—fearing Mrs. Abbot could not stand it. Neither did he care to do any unnecessary lying, so he answered:

"I'm quite sure Mr. Draper knows where your husband is, and that Mr. Abbot knows all about the bonds and certificates. Confidentially, I can tell you that Mr. Abbot was never far away from home, but he was a little out of his head. He's all right, now, though, I guess, and Mr. Draper will be likely to have him waiting for you."

"Gracious Heaven!" cried Mrs. Abbot, and the next instant was being supported by Lucy.

"Confound it! I've made a mess of it!" muttered Sam.

"Indeed you have, sir!" affirmed Lucy, as, having supported her mother to a lounge, she turned to the young detective and continued:

"Now, sir, will you please say plainly if my father is, as I suspect, awaiting us at Brookvale?"

"He is," was the meek reply.

"Thank you. I've no doubt you meant kindly, but next time I hope you will not have so poor an opinion of what a woman can bear."

"But he is—is sick," explained Sam, quite upset by the attack of the angry beauty.

"What else? Please don't trifle with me, at all events, Mr. Sharp—be as plain as you please."

Lucy spoke quietly, but firmly, and in very few words Sam explained her father's condition and its causes.

"Thank you! thank you! You were right not to have told it too quickly," declared Lucy. "Poor mother is not very strong, and could not have borne it. Leave the explanation to me. I will break it to her while we are on the way."

As may be imagined, Sam was only too happy to relinquish this task to Lucy, and when Mrs. Abbot had recovered a little, they started for Brookvale.

At Brookvale a carriage was hired, and the party were quickly in front of the Abbot cottage, where the noise of their arrival brought forth Draper, "workingman," and Detective King.

Upon seeing the former, Lucy blushed faintly, but another carriage which came tearing up from the opposite direction, claimed the attention of all, and to the astonishment of at least one (Sam), Lightning Lew Pryce leaped from it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE GENUINE GENEROUS ACT.

ON leaving Sam, the veteran detective proceeded to Police Headquarters, where he was closeted with the superintendent for a full half-hour, and when he departed, was accompanied by that gentleman himself.

Their destination was the palatial residence of Mr. Wright, and they lost no time in getting there, although five minutes after Pryce's arrival at Headquarters, the best detectives within call had been hurried away to various steamship piers and railroad depots.

"So, I think we've got him safe enough," ob-

served the superintendent, as they left Headquarters. "He cannot attempt to leave the city, this morning, without being nabbed, and I happen to know he was at home last night, for one of our men—King—is keeping an eye on him."

"King?" queried Pryce, in surprise, "why I understood he had been dismissed, or suspended, some time ago?"

"So he was—but for a purpose. You see, he was following up this Abbot affair through that mysterious Mrs. Strange, and we soon found there was pressure being brought to protect her."

"Tracing for the source of this pressure, we found it to be Wright, the banker. This looked queer, and King was suspended as a 'blind,' but he has been working on the case all the time."

"Confound him! He, too, has been playing a double game with me," was the listener's mental comment, but then came the consolatory thought:

"But you are the man who found Abbot!"

There was little time for reflection, however, for they were now at Wright's residence, where it was easily seen something unusual had happened.

Notwithstanding the superintendent's precautions, the banker had left the city—left it never to return. An hour previous to their arrival, he had been found dead, with a revolver in his hand, and a bullet in his brain.

The household was in a state of great excitement; Mrs. Wright, prostrated by the terrible shock, was in her room, and the callers pushed their way to the death-chamber.

"Somebody warned him!" declared the superintendent. "We must ascertain if he received any letters, or callers, this morning."

"Yes," assented Pryce, and turning to a servant who had followed them to the room, asked who took care of the dead man.

"Mr. Johnson, sir," replied the girl, and after a moment's hesitation, added:

"But he's gone, sir—run away. He was terribly frightened, and said Mr. Rummel told him this morning that if anything happened Mr. Wright he would hold him responsible."

The superintendent and detective exchanged glances, and the former asked:

"What time did Mr. Rummel call?"

"Very early, sir; while most of us were still asleep."

"Ah! Important business to warrant such an early call, eh, Pryce?"

"Yes; that accounts for this," returned the detective, nodding toward the bed; and then to the servant:

"There were no other callers, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Or letters?"

"No, sir."

"Thank you; that will do," and taking this as a hint to leave, the girl quitted the room.

"Well, there's no doubt Rummel's the man who warned him and spoiled your triumph, Lew," asserted the superintendent, sympathetically, for they were old friends, and he could appreciate Pryce's disappointment.

"Yes; I wish there was a way of reaching him for it!" was the savage rejoinder.

"That, I fear, is impossible. There would be no crime in warning his client of danger of arrest, and whatever knowledge they have had, or advice given, regarding these other affairs, you may rely upon it that Rowe & Rummel are too smart to put themselves in our power."

"I'm afraid—Ah! What's that?"

As Pryce thus suddenly interrupted himself, he sprung toward the bed (with a rapidity that gave a physical reason for "Lightning Lew") and snatched a piece of paper from the pillow above the dead man's head.

"What is it?" eagerly inquired the superintendent, and in response, Pryce read it to him.

"By heavens!" cried Pryce, on finishing the reading, "I can forgive him for disappointing me. That one genuine generous act, squares the account between us!"

What that act was, will be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FINAL SURPRISE.

THERE is little more to be told, but that little being of a happy nature, it is as well to tell it.

With the death of Wright, and his assumption of the forgeries and robberies which he had caused, though not committed, Lightning Lew's business in New York was ended, and hurrying to the Grand Central Depot, he caught an Express train which stopped at P—, the first station above Brookvale.

Hiring a buggy at P—, the detective having been lucky enough to chance on a spirited horse,

let the animal out on the road to the cottage, chuckling as he thought of Sam's astonishment, if he should beat the latter back to the cottage.

As Sam's party came by an "accommodation" train—which we are informed by a suburban friend means, that it is run to accommodate the movements of the cows along the line—Pryce came near accomplishing his purpose, and as it was, arrived hardly a minute behind them.

With a significant "all right!" to Sam and Draper, a rather cool "good-morning!" to King, and a smiling bow to the ladies, the veteran detective led the way into the cottage.

As the party entered the parlor, they were met by millionaire Draper, and the doctor.

"Mr. Abbot is sleeping back here," explained the latter, "and I hope will be himself again when he awakes."

This pleasing intelligence caused the anxious wife and daughter of the injured man to greet millionaire Draper, who now approached, with more friendliness than they otherwise would have, but to the amazement of both, he caught Lucy in his arms and kissed her.

"Release me, sir! How dare you!" cried the indignant girl, and, finding her command unheeded, appealed to the "workingman."

"Mr. Draper! Will you not protect me from—"

"From your brother, my dear Lucy!" interrupted the millionaire, releasing her, as he spoke.

"Yes," he continued, in answer to the wondering looks of mother and daughter, "I am the son of Mr. Abbot's first wife, as you, my dear Lucy, are her daughter, but it is a long story, and it may be as well to await your father's awakening before—"

At that moment a call from the back parlor announced that Mr. Abbot had awakened, and after being cautioned by the physician against exciting the patient, Mrs. Abbot and Lucy were permitted to spend a few minutes with him, but on joining them, to put a stop to the talking, Doctor Smallbones found his patient so wonderfully improved, that he allowed the mother and daughter to remain.

Not only that, but at Abbot's request, the others came to where he was lying, and then in a carefully guarded way the various members of the party told their stories.

Lightning Lew, who preferred to speak last, had apparently finished his story, when he announced the tragic death of Wright, but after a few moments' silence, and a few whispered words with the doctor, he began again:

"And, now, Mr. Abbot, I must warn you that there is a very pleasant surprise still in store for you, and as the doctor thinks it safe, I may as well complete the happiness which seems pouring in on you, by reading a scrap of paper which I found on Wright's pillow."

"No man is altogether bad, Mr. Abbot," continued the veteran detective, "and before he died, Wright performed one genuine generous act, by which he repaired as far as possible the wrongs done you."

This prelude presaged something extraordinary, and all waited impatiently until Pryce, having found the paper referred to, read:

"Abbot is innocent of the forgeries and robberies charged against him. Why he should run away I cannot imagine, for I alone am guilty of them, and I, alone, received the benefit of them."

This very important scrap of paper was signed by the late President of the Great American Banking & Trading Co., and the sensation produced by Pryce's reading of it, is more easily imagined than described.

Wright had ended his career by one genuine generous act, as Pryce phrased it. The few lines found on his pillow, saved Abbot, and six months later, (when the latter was restored to health,) there was a quiet wedding in the once mysterious cottage at Brookvale.

Lucy Abbot, and "workingman" Draper, were the couple congratulated, while "millionaire" Draper, was "best man," and looked almost as happy as the groom—and it may safely be assumed that the latter looked anything but gloomy.

All the detectives engaged on the case attended the wedding, as did Austin—Sam Sharp's employer—and when returning King remarked:

"Well, Lew, old boy, that's the finishing touch to your triumph."

"It's Sam's triumph, not mine," quietly returned Pryce. "But for Sam, I would have been in atoms—as would the man I was looking for."

"Glad you were, and are, pleased with our

protege," said Austin, looking proudly at Sam, and referring to the latter, added:

"I knew when it was his inning, he'd put up a big score."

THE END.

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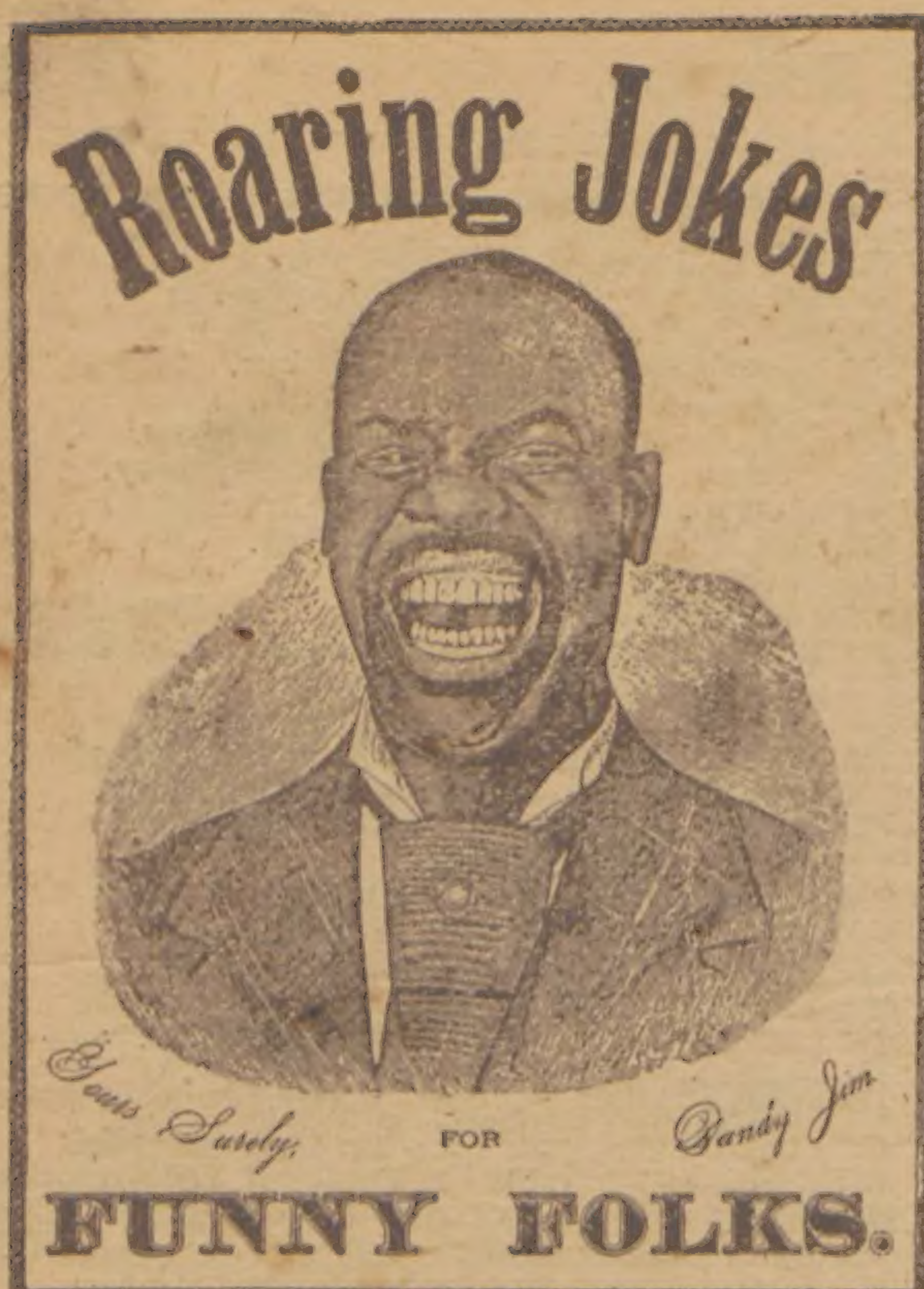
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